

STRANGERS NO MORE: HELPING THE  
REFUGEE REDISCOVER THEIR  
SELF IMAGE IN GOD

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	v
DEDICATION .....	vi
ABBREVIATIONS .....	vii
EPIGRAPH .....	viii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS .....	7
2. STATE OF THE ART OF THIS MINISTRY .....	16
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	25
4. METHODOLOGY .....	74
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	85
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION .....	110
APPENDIX	
A. TERMINOLOGY .....	123
B. BIBLE STUDY COURSE OUTLINE.....	126
C. PRE AND POST TESTS SURVEY - REGISTRATION FORM.....	129
D. ROSENBERGER TEST .....	132
E. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ESTABLISHED REFUGEES .....	135

F. STORIES OF ESTABLISHED REFUGEES .....	140
G. BIOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF ESTABLISHED REFUGEES.....	147
H. BIOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF TARGET GROUP .....	149
I. CALENDAR OF CLASSES AND TOPICS.....	151
J. RESULTS FROM THE ROSENBERGER TESTS.....	154
K. RATED PROGRAM TOPICS.....	156
L. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES.....	158
M. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES .....	160
N. IMPACT OF BIBLE STUDY.....	163
O. DATA ASSESSMENTS.....	165
P. FINAL PROGRAM EVALUATIONS.....	168
Q. ACTION RESEARCH MINISTRY TEAM.....	170
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	173

## **ABSTRACT**

### **STRANGERS NO MORE: HELPING THE REFUGEE REDISCOVER THEIR SELF IMAGE IN GOD**

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The context of this project is the Apostolic Church of Phoenix, Arizona. Eighty percent of this congregation is comprised of refugees from various countries. These refugees exhibit poor self-image and feelings of inadequacy, stemming from traumatic events in their past. The goal of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of bible studies, scripture readings, affirmations, meditations, prayer, and worship, in improving the self-esteem of these members. It is expected that using these spiritual elements within a six-week program will result in improved self-esteem. This study will employ the phenomenology approach of qualitative research to test this hypothesis.

## **DEDICATION**

To my husband Chris, a beautiful soul, dedicated to God and family. I appreciate your contributions to this work.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AA	Alcoholic Anonymous
INA	Immigration and Naturalization Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UTS	United Theological Seminary



For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt. I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

—Jeremiah 8:21-22

## INTRODUCTION

September, 16, 1994, Kigali, Rwanda: Twelve year old Marie sat in her classroom when she heard the first gunshot. Her teacher and the other students ran to the closest exit. Everyone followed the sound of fleeing steps to the nearby forest. Her heart pounded with fear. It seemed like an eternity before the gun shots finally silenced. Fellow students hid in the bush with her and nobody wanted to leave until they were sure the Hutu gunmen had left. Three hours later, Marie joined a group of people and they slowly made their way to the main road. Bodies and dismembered body parts were scattered about. The Rwandan genocide had begun. Unknown to Marie, the situation was going to get worse. Marie saw the bodies of her teacher and her best friend lying on the side of the road. She was not permitted to touch them or cover their bodies. People ran from the scene. She fled in a packed lorry and headed to the suburbs where she tried to locate her family. Finally, she found her father and brothers hiding in the bushes beside her home.

They found the body of her mother, a Tutsi, who had been killed with a machete. They could not bury her. They then fled to Burundi in the middle of night. From Burundi they fled to the Mugunga refugee camp in the border city of Goma in Eastern DRC.

Because of the living conditions in the camp, her father found them a house in the city of Mbandaka where they lived until December 1997. Early that morning, Rwandan soldiers drove their jeeps into the town. Again, they heard bursts of gunfire for four long hours. Bodies of Rwandans lay unattended in the street. That night Marie's family fled to the border and finally, in 2001, they arrived at a camp in Botswana. Living in the camp was the nightmare they had anticipated: disease, violence, death and poverty. Marie hated living in the camp. There was never a moment of silence. Families lived in cramped quarters. The noisy camp however, did not quench the sound of the gunfire ringing in her ears.

The family joined fellow Rwandans to create a sense of community, but the constant suspicions of each other and fear of the genocide made it impossible to form communal bonds. After two years in the camp the family was delighted to hear that they were among refugees designated for immigration to the United States.

Once, in the United States, they were embraced by a local church in Phoenix, Arizona. Through the agency of the Arizona Department of Economic Services, they were issued food stamps and housing. The church offered food, transportation and connected them with the Rwandan community in the greater Phoenix area. In the United States, Marie was relieved that the ringing of the gun shots in her head became less frequent. The fireworks on the fourth of July caused her to run out the apartment in panic. She thought the gunmen had returned. The imaginary gunshots, ringing in her ears continued and she experienced nightmares. Marie was afraid to tell anyone because she was afraid that they would think she was crazy. Her mother, her only confidant, had died, and her father was burdened with looking for employment. Life in the United States had

its complexities. She and her family were learning to speak English and money was scarce. She and her brothers were having difficulties at school where they were often taunted because of their accents, and so making friends was difficult. At her young age, Marie became the mother figure of the home. She tried to help her younger brothers with their homework and to develop a sense of discipline. Her father began abusing alcohol and she feared her brothers were associating with troubled individuals within the apartment complex. Her life was full of sadness. She tried to make sense of her situation but often felt overwhelmed and helpless in the face of these challenging and overwhelming situations. Worse still, the sound of gunshots still rang in her head.

In casual conversation, people often use the word *refugee* to refer to someone who has fled his or her home to escape war, natural disaster, economic hardship, or political persecution. However, the term has a precise legal definition. Refugee status depends on why a person fled his or her home country.<sup>1</sup> As with Marie, in the above story, a refugee is someone who, "Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."<sup>2</sup> The refugee therefore, is a person who has experienced persecution because of political beliefs or religious activities, or because they are members of a particular ethnic group and has fled to safeguard his or her life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Who is a Refugee?" Cultural Orientation Resource Center, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/about-refugees#sthash.u6NRGV4g.dpuf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Who is a Refugee?" Cultural Orientation Resource Center, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/about-refugees#sthash.u6NRGV4g.dpuf>.

People who flee because of economic hardship or are victims of earthquakes, famines, floods, or other kinds of natural disasters, are not considered refugees. The vast majority of immigrants in the United States are economic immigrants and fall under this category. These people may be deserving of humanitarian assistance or they may be admitted to the United States as immigrants, but they are not considered refugees.<sup>4</sup> The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, established the legal standards for refugee protection, and the United States is a signatory to the agreement. In 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), established the branch of the United Nations charged with the international protection of refugees. The U. S. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952, authorizes the admission and resettlement of refugees to the United States.<sup>5</sup> The designation of who is a refugee is important because of the legitimate concerns of the burdens immigrants (and refugees) present to their accepting country. The reality is that while other immigrant groups have sought and obtained access into the United States, legally or illegally, refugees are here solely because they were facing imminent death.

Like Marie, a majority of refugees have experienced some type of traumatic events.<sup>6</sup> The most commonly reported events include, being in a combat situation, loss of close family member, lack of food and lack of shelter. The intensity of their traumatic events often varies depending on whether the event was personally experienced, or if it was merely observed or witnessed. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), lack of

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis Cose, *A Nation of Strangers: Prejudice, Politics and the Population of America* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1992), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Charles.G, Firoz, et al., *Psychiatric Morbidity Associated With Human Rights Abuses in East Timor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

shelter, near death experiences, separation from family, and being a victim of kidnapping are positively associated with the presence of depression.<sup>7</sup> The high prevalence of depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, in the refugee population, suggests there is a great need for the implementation of mental health programs and spiritual interventions by the body of Christ. Christian organizations account for the majority of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) assigned to help refugees in their resettlement efforts. Unfortunately, the body of Christ is unaware of the emotional pain that the refugees carry and has treated this set of strangers as they do other groups of immigrants; offering physical help where needed while overlooking the effects of the pain and trauma of their past. In Jeremiah 8:21-22 the Lord laments, "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt. I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?"<sup>8</sup>

Refugees in our church communities are hurting and to this researcher, there is a balm in Gilead and it can be found in the Word of God. Jesus is our healer and He has healed countless numbers of hurting people. He has invited the hurting to come and find rest in Him. The body of Christ must rise to this challenge and extend help to its hurting members. This project attempts to use spiritual elements such as prayer, the Word of God, meditation and affirmations to bring healing to this group. The project presupposes that the application of these spiritual elements should bring overall healing and change in the self-image of these refugees.

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<sup>7</sup> Firoz, et al., *Psychiatric Morbidity Associated With Human Rights Abuses in East Timor*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 8: 21-22, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

The researcher is a Pastor at a church that has a high refugee population and has witnessed firsthand, the declining loss of a positive self-image among the refugee population. Through the opportunity created by her doctoral dissertation, she has sought to address this issue by embarking on an intensive six weeks of spiritual healing. This project is outlined as follows:

Chapter One relates the researcher's history, information about the context church, and the synergies that brought about the development of this project.

Chapter Two includes discussion on the contemporary literature on the topic and application models in other areas of expertise.

Chapter Three establishes the theoretical foundation of the project including Biblical, Historical, Theological and integrative study. These are used to prove the appropriateness of this model for the Church.

Chapter Four provides the research methodology and research design used for the research project.

Chapter Five includes a detailed description of the project implementation, execution, data collection, analysis and outcomes.

Chapter Six is a summary of the results of the project, implementation, guidelines for future projects and reflections on the field experience. The researcher prays that this project will help the body of Christ to meet the challenges of assisting refugees in their journey to healing and wholeness.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **Spiritual Autobiography**

In this chapter, the researcher focuses on the nature and scope of the ministry this project model is based on. The personal story of the researcher is recounted and connections to the context church are discovered. The synergies that were encountered along the way became essential to the development of this research project.

The researcher's spiritual journey has been comprised of many jagged spiritual encounters. These encounters led her from Nigeria to the United States in 1982. As an immigrant student the researcher worked hard to obtain a Juris Doctorate followed by a Master's degree in Education.

Her experiences culminated in her final response to the call of God in her life in 1992 when she realized that God indeed was calling her to the ministry. Her strict Catholic background had left her with a lot of confusion about religion and consequently the rejection of God's call.

In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren warns that, "Nothing matters more than knowing God's purpose for your life and nothing can compensate for not



knowing them.”<sup>1</sup> Through many miraculous incidents, the researcher was finally able to accept her call and proclaim the gospel. The specifics of her call were later revealed to her in a vision from the Lord where she was instructed to, “Reach the unreached.”

In obedience to the call, the researcher and her husband started a congregation that serves the local community through feeding programs for the poor and the homeless. As the church fed the homeless and shared the love of God, hearts were touched and people came to know God personally. The researcher was greatly impacted by the homeless ministry and felt a great sense of peace as a result of fulfilling the Lord’s call.

Gradually, the researcher’s role as the minister responsible for the homeless ministry expanded to include assisting refugee members with adjusting to their new homeland. Refugees comprised the majority of the now growing church. She began researching for resources that would help the new arrivals adjust to the challenges in their new homeland. As a result, a new project was born which was directed toward the education of refugee students. The graduation rates of refugee students in Arizona are dismal, so the researcher developed educational curricula that were designed to aide failing refugee students. With her degree in education, the researcher was able to pilot a program that helped refugee students remain in school and to graduate. The program is in its early stages of implementation.

The researcher, in cooperation with her church staff, was also able to incorporate Bible studies and prayers designed to make the new arrivals more resourceful citizens of the United States. Unfortunately, refugees carry with them complex social,

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 34-36.

emotional, and psychological problems that pose a challenge to a local church community. Problems such as language barriers, lack of education, differences in cultures or “culture shock,” loss of family and social support and the loss of employment are just a few of the challenges these individuals face. It takes a truly welcoming church to help refugees integrate. More importantly, it takes a community of loving people who recognize the deep love that God has for the stranger, and are willing to accommodate these new arrivals. Having noted the special challenges that churches face helping refugee members, the researcher began investigating ways to help eliminate some of these difficulties.

The challenges that the researcher faces with respect to refugees is not unique to her church. Currently, the world is witnessing a massive increase of mobile populations of peoples within local and international boundaries. The numbers speak clearly: there are 214 million migrants worldwide, 152 million refugees and 271 million displaced people.<sup>2</sup> By 2012, 45.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflicts, generalized violence, and human rights violations. The United States is a ratifying country under the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees and thus adopts an annual allocation of refugees from different parts of the world. In fact the United States is the world’s top resettlement country.<sup>3</sup> Since 1975, the United States has welcomed over three million refugees from all over the world. These people are present in church communities all across the United States.

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Cohen, “On the Move: the Migration Imperative” *Global Transitions* 3 (January 2011).

<sup>3</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Global Trends 2012: Displacement, The New 21st Century Challenge, June 19, 2013), accessed 23 March 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51c169d84.html>.

The presence of refugees within our church communities requires that the churches be prepared to accommodate these new members. In this project, the researcher tries to resolve one of the myriad of problems that refugees present in a local church, that of low self-image. The researcher believes that her life's experiences, coupled with the call of the Lord on her life, have prepared her for this unique challenge.

### **Context of the Study**

The context of this project is a church body located in Phoenix, Arizona, which consists of a population made up of eight-two percent refugees from various nations. The writer and her husband serve as pastors. The church is made up of a diverse local congregation of people from different countries of the world. Five African countries and two South American countries are represented in the church. There are a few Native Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics. Predominantly, single mothers and couples form the majority of the church memberships. The members consist primarily of first generation refugee and immigrant families. The church consists of forty adults and seventeen children. The church recently experienced a spilt resulting in declining membership. The researcher and her husband are prayerfully recruiting new members while seeking avenues to impart spiritual growth to the congregation.

Arizona has one of the highest intakes of refugee in the country. According to the U. S Census Bureau, over 65,000 refugee families have been resettled in the

Phoenix Metropolitan valley.<sup>4</sup> In 2010, approximately 2,977 refugees were resettled in Maricopa County.<sup>5</sup> The annual figures have increased over the past ten years due to the increased instability in the Middle East and Africa.<sup>6</sup> The refugee communities in Phoenix constitute an array of groups including refugee/asylum groups from countries such as Haiti, Rwanda, Liberia, Sudan, and Somalia. Even though the refugee groups are diverse, the numbers of refugees who speak English poorly or not at all have more than tripled.<sup>7</sup> Eighty-two percent of the membership of the context church consists of refugees.

This church is seeking ways to address the issues that confront its newer members as they attempt to adapt to their new society. These issues range from basic challenges of poor self-image to problems of social adjustment. Other challenges such as language barriers, cultural assimilation, the need for additional education, and physical and emotional traumas make up the myriad of challenges facing these new arrivals. Through the years, the researcher has identified challenges inherent in advocating and helping refugees. Consistently, the researcher has observed an innate lack of positive self-image and identity with the refugees in her local congregation. Many refugees have faced daunting emotional and psychological challenges which impact their feelings of self-worth. The refugee members in this church, like most refugees, have become victims of

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<sup>4</sup> “Trending data: The US Census Bureau, 2011,” *US Census Bureau*, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://uscbl.org/trendingdata.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

inner woundedness as a result of past traumas.<sup>8</sup> This pattern has resulted in high levels of alcoholism, spousal abuse, crime, and other behavioral problems. Compounding this problem is the fact that most refugees do not seek mental health services because of their cultural beliefs. Refugees hide behind the façade of wellness while suffering great psychological traumas.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, it has been observed that this group is not making adequate efforts to assimilate into the larger community within or outside of the church. This lack of integration is contrary to the UN charter goals of resettlement and integration. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated as its global priority, the need to ensure that the wellbeing of refugees is accomplished. The UN Charter emphasizes the importance of providing adequate *reception and integration* so that the rights of refugees are protected.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, because many local churches and other organizations are not offering adequate help, true integration and resettlement is not being achieved.

### Synergy

There are several factors that have contributed to the synergy of this project. The context of the ministry is one such factor. Through observations and interactions within the church, the researcher has observed that refugee members experience feelings of

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<sup>8</sup> Dianne D. Coles, *Wilt Thou Be Made Whole: Infusing Life into the Church through a Ministry of Faith, Healing, and Wholeness* (Dayton, OH: United Theological Seminary, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Angela Burnett and Michael Peel, "Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain: The Health of Survivors of Torture and Organized Violence," *British Medical Journal* 322, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> United High Commission on Refugees "UNHCR Urges More Countries to Establish Refugee Resettlement Programs" accessed July 5, 2010, [www.unhcr.org/4c31c12366html](http://www.unhcr.org/4c31c12366html).

inadequacy, failure, low self-esteem, and poor self- image. This problem is more pervasive within the refugee members than with other migrant groups in the church. It is also evident that this problem has made it difficult for the refugee to interact with other groups within the church. Refugee members are not making efforts towards integration into the larger society.

The researcher was challenged by this situation and looked for solutions by first contacting other local churches. Her investigation revealed that despite the fact that the Word of God offers guidelines and a framework for handling such issues; most churches have busied themselves by offering feeding and clothing programs for newcomers. While these programs are needed, most pastors are not helping their refugee membership deal with issues of low self-esteem and deep psychological damage. The oppression of the mind continues for the refugees, even within the walls of our church communities.

Another factor that contributes to the synergy of this project is the vision of the Lord which was shown to the researcher some years back. In the vision, the researcher was directed to reach the unreached. This part of the vision was particularly vivid because it was evident the Lord wanted to reach those who were not easily accepted or recognized in society. The vision resulted in a strong desire to touch the lives of people on the fringes of society.

Significant synergy in this project can further be attributed to the researcher's background. The researcher experienced discrimination and rejection in her country of origin, Nigeria. There, like many woman, she was treated as a second class citizen. She grew up knowing that she would always be relegated to an inferior status in a country that

was male dominated. Unfortunately, even in a civilized world, her experience of being relegated to second class citizenship status has persisted. As an immigrant in a new land, the researcher experienced rejection and discrimination that are common to newcomers.

<sup>11</sup> It is her perseverance and dependency on God that has kept her focused through difficult times. The knowledge that God loved and accepted her, helped lift her to greater physical and spiritual levels. It is this knowledge that propelled her towards success, despite the feelings of inadequacy that she had earlier experienced. It is this same knowledge that she wishes to impart into the lives of the refugee members in her congregation. This project offers her an excellent opportunity to express the knowledge of the love of God to newcomers, to help in their healing process, and to help instill in them a healthy self-esteem.

Like the refugees members in her church, the researcher herself experienced a pattern of low self-esteem and crisis of identity. She understands most refugees are traumatized by past horrific experiences. She also understands that in addition to their past traumas, refugees who are living in a new and foreign land experience additional stress. Their new homeland is generally more complex and this can be intimidating. It is not surprising that refugees have resorted to viewing themselves as second class citizens, people without identities, lost in a foreign country, and not belonging to the larger society.<sup>12</sup>

The researcher shall use affirmations, reflections, and declarations to buttress the fact that God indeed loves the stranger. Passages culled from the scripture, which gives

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<sup>11</sup> Ellis Cose, *A Nation of Strangers*.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Books 2009), 179.

affirmations on the true worth of a stranger shall be recited daily and memorized. With these scriptures and reflections, the researcher believes the participants shall realize the overwhelming love God has for them. In addition, worship, prayer, and communion shall be conducted as part of the healing process.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY**

In this chapter, the researcher will review the contemporary literature on the project model. She will discuss application models in other areas of expertise and its relevance to this model.

The researcher believes in the transformative power of scripture and affirmations. These techniques are used successfully by organizations like Alcoholic Anonymous (AA). Alcoholic Anonymous relies heavily on spiritual elements such as confessions, daily affirmations, and recitations to change innate behaviors. In the same the way, the researcher believes that the use of the Word of God in the form of affirmations, prayer, and bible study should enhance the psychological and emotional well- being of the refugees within her context.

Historically, affirmations have been used in eastern religions as a source of healing and restoration of the body and soul. There are also churches who utilize scripture affirmations as a means of imparting knowledge and healing.

Unfortunately, there are few churches that employ the use of scriptures and Bible reading as sources of healing and recovery for refugees. Most churches have “church as usual” and do not have programs targeted towards the healing of the refugee’s self-esteem.

Literature documenting the current mental, psychological and emotional well-being of refugees is well established. In various scientific journals, literary works and psychiatric journals, there have been substantial qualitative and quantitative studies undertaken on this group. The general consensus is that there is a prevalence of mental health disorders ranging from generalized anxiety, depressive disorders, stress disorder, and social phobias.<sup>1</sup> These psychological disorders are manifested as self-hate, low self-esteem, alcoholism, violence, suicidal ideations, as well as a host of other psychological dysfunctions.<sup>2</sup> In a major study conducted by the University of Oxford of 6,743 adult refugees in western countries, about nine percent were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and about six percent were diagnosed with major depression. The children of refugees were also found to have a higher occurrence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder at seventeen percent.

The conclusion of the Oxford research is that refugees are up to ten times more likely to exhibit Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health disorders than the age-matched general population in those countries.<sup>3</sup> Mental health disorders in refugees can be exhibited as negative self-image, depression and self-hate. It is normally characterized as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) where there is trauma involved, and can range in severity from depression, to severe psychiatric disorder. PTSD is triggered by a past traumatic event such as war, natural disaster, diseases, the killing of

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<sup>1</sup> US Dept. of Veteran Affairs Publication, *PTSD in Refugees* (Washington, D.C.: PTSD National Center for PTSD), 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

loved ones, violence, physical abuse, and displacement.<sup>4</sup> These stressors are common for the refugee while in their countries of origin, however, their stressors do not end there. Refugees experience recurring losses, challenges and changes during their exile and on their way to freedom. While in refugee camps, some of them face additional stressors like socio-economic disadvantages, poor physical health, and the collapse of their social support networks.<sup>5</sup> By the time they eventually arrive to their country of freedom, most refugees have encountered some form of trauma that has significantly impacted their psychological well-being. The literature on the refugee's psychological well-being confirms that the average refugee has suffered multiple stressors which may continue while in their new homeland.<sup>6</sup>

### Measurement Issues

With refugees representing different languages and cultures, one of the problems presented by researchers is: what is the appropriate measure for assessing their psychological well-being? In the past, it has been difficult translating measuring devices into other languages. Added to this factor is that most measuring devices are not sensitive to the cultural norms of the refugee. The lack of proper assessment tools makes it difficult to draw conclusions for assessing the psychological well-being of all refugees.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> US Dept. of Veteran Affairs Publication, *PTSD in Refugees*.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Porter and Nick Haslam, "Forced Displacement in Yugoslavia: A Meta-Analysis of Psychological Consequences and Their Moderation," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 14, no. 4 (2001): 877-834.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> US Dept. of Veteran Affairs Publication, *PTSD in Refugees*.

The difficulty in measuring refugee psychological well-being is documented in various scientific journals and research materials. While some researchers have sought to measure refugees psychological issues based on standard diagnostic codes, others contend that these measuring devices are not reliable and do not reflect the experiences of refugees.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately these challenges have been resolved with the emergence of tools such as the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Impact of Event Scale. These are more reliable and culturally sensitive measures of post-traumatic stress disorders and trauma. The current trend is that refugee's psychological well-being can be properly measured and assessed.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding the cultural conflicts inherent in earlier measuring devices, researchers agree with the following facts: (a) War has a significant impact on anyone. (b) Further displacement (whether internal or external) impacts more significantly on people's lives. (c) Those that have lived in institutionalized refugee centers are even more traumatized.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, these are the typical experiences of most refugees.

This project deviates from the use of scientific measuring tools because the participants are not being treated medically. The methodology that will be employed in this study is an exploratory, qualitative research design. The predominant research process to be used is phenomenology which utilizes interviews, documentation, and

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<sup>8</sup> Win C. Kleijn, Johan E. Hovens, and J. J. Rodenberg, "Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms in Refugees: Assessments with Harvard Trauma Questionnaires and the Hoplar Symptoms Checklist in 25 Different Languages," *Psychological Reports* 88 (2001): 527-532.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

observations for data collection.<sup>11</sup> Qualitative research design suits this study because the researcher wishes to identify changes in attitude, perceptions and subjective influences of the refugee participants. Therefore, interviewing and observing the participants is the best viable data collection method for this type of research.

Measurement tools shall include pre and post study tools, interviews, journals and questionnaires. Pre-study baseline tests shall include surveys, journals and questionnaires to evaluate the current state of mind of the participants. It will further be used to assess the effectiveness of the treatment method that is intended for this study. Post tests and evaluations shall be used to evaluate the effectiveness of Bible studies, affirmations, scripture readings, and prayer on the self-esteem of the refugee participants. Questionnaires shall be administered at the end of the project to assess the participants understanding of the effect of Bible studies, prayer, worship and scriptural affirmations on their self-worth. Data collected at the end of the six week intervention program shall be evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the various treatment methods and to identify areas of weakness for future implementations.<sup>12</sup>

### **Effective Intervention Methods**

Although some progress has been made in the use of appropriate assessment measures, there are sharp deviations among researchers on the most effective interventions for helping refugees process emotional and psychological issues. This has

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<sup>11</sup> John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

resulted in different models being proposed for the treatment of refugees with psychological and emotional deficiencies.<sup>13</sup> Burnett and Peel have offered group therapy as a treatment for those who have experienced similar events.<sup>14</sup> DeJong, Scholte, Koeter, and Hart have all suggested that psychological interventions should focus on strengthening the community through therapeutic classes and educational campaigns.<sup>15</sup> Yule has proposed addressing targeted psychological risk factors. For example, where depression is aggravated due to a lack of employment, measures should be taken to provide employment. In other words, removing certain stressors can relieve psychological and emotional issues.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Richard F. Mollica, a preeminent and well respected psychotherapist from the Harvard Trauma Unit, has stressed that the availability of certain variables such as extended family members, education, self- help groups, and traditional cultural practices is essential for the recovery of refugees.<sup>17</sup>

Alternatively, Mollica and his group of researchers have offered a model that incorporates religious activities as a means of recovery for refugees. This group found that refugees involved in religious activities were less likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders, mental disorders, and psychological dysfunctions than participants with

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<sup>13</sup> Angela Burnett and Michael Peel, "Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain: The Health of Survivors of Torture and Organized Violence," *British Medical Journal* 322 (2001): 626-629.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Jeroen P. DeJong, Willem F. Scholte, Maarten W. J. Koeter and A. A. Hart, "The Prevalence of Mental Health Problems on Rwandan and Burmese Refugee Camps," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 102, no. 3 (October, 2000): 171-177.

<sup>16</sup> William Yule, "From Programs to Ethnic Cleaning: Meeting the Needs of War-Affected Children," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychology of Allied Disciplines*. 41, no. 6 (2000): 695-702.

<sup>17</sup> Richard F. Mollica, et al, "Longitudinal Study of Psychiatric Symptoms, Disability, Mortality and Emigration among Bosnian Refugees," *Journal of American Medical Association* 286, no. 5 (2001): 534-546.

no religious activities.<sup>18</sup> Religious activities such as prayer, devotionals, bible studies, and communal worship were found to enhance and promote the well-being of participants. In his book, Mollica stressed the ability of the human mind to recover from the most brutal experiences and suggested that it is medical arrogance to require refugees obtain medical interventions. The human mind, he advocated, can be healed and restored with religious activities that are conducted in a controlled environment.<sup>19</sup>

It is to this model that the researcher subscribes. The researcher believes in the transformative power of scripture and affirmations. In the same way, the researcher believes that the use of the Word of God in the form of affirmations and prayer should enhance the psychological and emotional well-being of refugees.

The researcher proposes a model that will explore the role of Bible studies, affirmations, prayer, worship and communion as a way of restoring the emotional well-being of refugees, while addressing the self-hate that can be found within them. Heb. 4:12 states that, “*The word of God is quick, and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” The Word of God can be a powerful tool for healing the soul and the mind.

This research study contributes to the literature by exploring the impact of scriptures, prayer, worship, affirmations and communion on the self-esteem of refugees. It is built on the proposition that when refugees begin to recover from past traumas, through bible study, prayers, and affirmations, their self-esteem will improve. The

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<sup>18</sup> Richard F. Mollica, et al, “Science-Based Policy to Psychological Interventions in Refugee Camps: A Cambodian Example,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* 234 (2001): 455-480.

<sup>19</sup> Richard F. Mollica, R, *Healing Invisible Wounds; Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).

researcher proposes a hypothesis that suggests that the use of scripture readings, meditations, reflections, prayers, daily affirmations, Bible studies, and worship should result in observable improvements of the self-esteem of refugee participants. It is hoped that if refugee members who have suffered past traumas complete the six weeks program of prayer, reflections, meditations and prayer, they should begin to perceive God as their healer and deliverer. They should experience the universality of God's love and ongoing concern for the total completeness and wholeness of the stranger. Healing shall flow from the studies and meditations on the word of God. The overall results will culminate in improved self-esteem, behavior, and attitude.

The researcher's framework of intervention shall consist of the use of biblical studies, daily affirmations, meditations, prayer and worship targeted at improving the refugee's self-esteem. Participants will meet twice a week, Saturdays and Wednesdays, for discussions, worship, prayers, and to study of the Word of God. Participants will be given daily affirmations to recite in the morning and at nighttime. Participants will be provided note pads and will be encouraged to write and discuss any changes during the meetings. Context Associates shall assist the researcher with interviews and follow up visits. A visit before and after the six weeks session shall be conducted to assess the impact of the treatment interventions.

During the Bible studies, the researcher shall explore biblical passages that establish the love that God has for the strangers or "*gers*" as the bible refers to them. From the Old Testament, biblical perspectives will be gleaned from the manner in which God shows compassion for His people, the "wandering Arameans." The study will further underscore God's position with reference to the treatment of strangers and his



instructions that strangers are well received and accommodated within the community of God's people. From the New Testament, the activities and teachings of Jesus shall be examined to lend critical reflection on the overall vision of Christ. Jesus came to save those who are downtrodden, rejected, and persecuted and desires to heal the brokenhearted. Jesus' love is extended to all God's children including the marginalized in the society.

The researcher shall use daily affirmations, reflections and declarations from scriptures to buttress the fact that God indeed loves the strangers. Passages culled from the scripture, which gives affirmations on the true worth of a believer and shall be recited daily and memorized. With these scriptures and reflections, the researcher hopes that the participants shall be impressed about the overwhelming love of God for strangers. In addition, worship, prayer and communion shall be conducted as part of the healing process.

In conclusion, with the bludgeoning of refugee population in the United States and the corresponding influx of refugees into our local church communities, it has become imperative that the body of Christ carry this segment of the church along with it and seek for ways to bring about true restoration to the refugees in our midst.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

In this chapter, the researcher establishes the theoretical foundation of the project including Biblical, Historical, Theological and Integrative study. These are used to prove the appropriateness of this model for the Church of Christ.

#### **Theological Foundation**

There are two theological foundations used to ground this research. Both the Theology of Immigration and Liberation Theology are applicable to this research. Both describe theological foundations relevant to the refugee and the immigrant.

Early church fathers did not have issues with welcoming strangers because they followed the directives of Jesus Christ who instructed the disciples to love and welcome all peoples. However in modern church history, the discourse on how the church should address the presence of strangers only began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the development of these two theological ideologies.

Currently, the world is witnessing a dramatic increase in the mobility of populations of peoples within local and international boundaries. The numbers speak clearly. There are 214 million migrants worldwide. There are 152 million refugees and 271 million internally displaced people.<sup>1</sup> Many of these people are present in church communities all over the world. What are the theological foundations and framework for the Theology of Immigration and Liberation Theology?<sup>2</sup>

### *The History and Origin of the Theology of Immigration*

Although the term “Theology of Immigration’ is not often heard in theological circles, it is not a new or alien concept in the Bible. The theology of immigration or the theology of human mobility as it is often referred to, describes the pattern of mobility surrounding the people of God both in the New and Old Testaments.<sup>3</sup> The biblical story of Abraham and Sarah in a foreign land, the exodus of their descendants from Egypt to the Promised Land, and the Babylonian exiles, are all examples that establish the migratory pattern of God’s people. During their journeys, God constantly reminded His people that they were to respect and love strangers. In the New Testament, Jesus also identified with the strangers and indicated that the attitude of welcoming strangers is a requirement for being a member of His new kingdom. His disciples practiced, preached and extolled the virtues of hospitality towards strangers. (Matthew 25: 3)

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Cohen, “On the Move: The Migration Imperative,” *Global 3* (January 2011):14-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Despite the obvious existence of migration in the Bible, systematic theology has often ignored the existence of the theology of immigration. The reason offered by various scholars is that for a long time, immigration has been considered a social phenomenon. It is perceived as not having much to do with the systemic reflection on Christian faith. It is void of intellectualism. But with the emergence of liberation theologians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the social phenomena of mass immigration shifts in countries all over the world, theologians began to reflect on this theological study and have offered greater insights on this approach.<sup>4</sup>

In the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, there were massive shifts in migration trends and churches filled with strangers. Pastors grappled with the operatives of Christian compassion as well as the need to live in harmony with the new arrivals in their Christian communities. The society was becoming increasingly more multicultural and pastors needed the tools and resources to sustain them in a society that was going through a deep process of transformation.

In the United States, the theology of immigration gained acceptance with the works of Hispanic and Latino theologies in the early 1970's. The plight of the undocumented alien was vividly explored by Alan Figueroa Deck, who wrote from a pastoral perspective on the controversial challenges of undocumented migration.<sup>5</sup> Later, other writers followed with essays dealing with the stigma of illegality. There were many awkward questions posed to the body of Christ, specifically to the pastors of congregations on the theology of welcoming illegal aliens. Questions never before

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<sup>4</sup> Robin Cohen, "On the Move: The Migration Imperative," *Global 3* (January 2011):14-17.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Figueroa Deck, "A Christian Perspective on the Reality of Illegal Immigration," *Social Thought* 4 (1978): 39-53.

encountered such as, “What do you do when an illegal worker appears on the steps of your church? What do you do when an illegal alien hides from authorities in the sanctuary of your church? Are you obligated to help an illegal brother who seeks refuge in your church? The answers to these questions gave rise to the Sanctuary Movement ignited by interreligious groups, in the 1980’s. The Movement rekindled the fire of evangelical and ecclesiastical thoughts on the issues of migration.<sup>6</sup> Currently, this theological study is gaining grounds and respectability as theologians wrestle with the responsibility that the church has for new visitors in our communities.<sup>7</sup>

### *A Theology of Acceptance*

The theology of immigration is the theology of acceptance.<sup>8</sup> The researcher is of the opinion that the bible admonishes believers to accept *all* peoples into our churches and communities. This call will necessitate knowledge of the scripture and the heart of God who embraces all peoples. In the Bible, it is clear that the heart of God seeks freedom for all people. It is the heart of God that is reflected in Exod. 3:7 where God said: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry. I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt. I will be with you”. The words, “I will be with you” affirms that God is present in all peoples and does not prefer

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<sup>6</sup> Deck, *A Christian Perspective on the Reality of Illegal Immigration*, 39-53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Maruskin, *Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome* (New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2012), 64-67.

one to another.<sup>9</sup> God is present where there is suffering and in all dimensions of humanity. To reject people, especially suffering peoples, like the refugees, is to reject God. Jesus moved among the downtrodden and touched the untouchables in the society. It is important for Christians to imitate the life of the Master and be doers of the word and not hearers only who deceive themselves. (James 1:22)

To accept a person means to embrace that person exactly as they are. It is important to emphasize that acceptance is not the same as tolerance and the Bible does not confuse welcoming strangers with tolerance. Instead the Bible teaches that strangers and visitors ought to be accepted and treated like we would treat one of our own. This theology of acceptance is a departure from societal expectation of tolerance towards people who are not like us. It is an inclusive and radical hospitality that forces the church to lend itself for the good of others.<sup>10</sup>

An example of this radical hospitality can be seen in the Benedictines practice of inclusive hospitality. “When we accept, we take an open stance to the other person. It is more than piously tolerating them. We stand on the same space and we appreciate who they are, right now at this moment, and affirm the Sacred in them”<sup>11</sup> Acceptance is a pathway to true biblical love. It is only through acceptance that true love can be practiced.<sup>12</sup> The Bible admonishes the believers to love your neighbor as ourselves and the only way to love our neighbor as ourselves is to accept them for who they are.

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<sup>9</sup> Maruskin, *Immigration and the Bible*, 23-28.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> “Mission Statement,” *The Order of St. Benedict*, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://www.osb.org/rb/html>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

The practice of the theology of immigration requires the church to build welcoming communities that reach out to the uprooted strangers. Members must demonstrate the love of God to all peoples and they must imbibe the vision of a true community of believers. A true community of believers is a diverse community of people from different cultural backgrounds and perspective as reflected in the book of Revelation. (Rev.7:9) People from all tribes, nations and tongues are seen worshipping the Lord in the latter times, a true reflection of the Body of Christ. This means that the church must create culturally sensitive programs to help new-comers feel welcome in their new environment. In this way, acceptance is practiced as well as preached.

Churches must employ scriptures, sacraments and prayers as a means of helping these new individuals to become functional in their new communities. The Word of God is replete with scriptures that are redemptive in purpose. God clearly assures the believer of His great love and desires for their wholeness and completeness. These scriptures, when recited, taught and affirmed in the heart of the believers, will go a long way in healing past hurts and injustices for these new individuals.

### *The History and Origins of Liberation Theology*

The origin of Liberation Theology is embedded in the action and belief that strives to liberate marginalized peoples from oppression.<sup>13</sup> In its early beginnings, liberation theology argued that God is present and working through people to free the oppressed and that God aligns Him-self with the poor or marginalized, opposing

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<sup>13</sup> Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Parthenian Press, 1987).

oppression. In this regard, salvation is not only a spiritual concept but also a physical concept.<sup>14</sup> Liberation Theology was birthed from the contextual realities of people in Latin America. The Latin American liberation struggles centered on the world of the poor. The socio-economic aspect of poverty results in the lack of food and housing, deprivation of health and education, exploitation of workers, unemployment, lack of respect and dignity, limitations in the areas of self-expression politics and religion.<sup>15</sup> Closely intertwined with the Latin America liberation struggles is the Roman Catholic expression of Liberation Theology. The Roman Catholic expression of Liberation Theology is a dominant social teaching that has its genesis in the Second Vatican Council.<sup>16</sup>

At the meeting of Latin American bishops the church affirmed its commitment to take a preferential option for the poor. Working through international and national Episcopal decisions, the church responded to the millions of people living with poverty, mal-nutrition, and inadequate health care.

As this movement evolved, various schools of thought within the Catholic Church sought to expand the definition of liberation theologies to include all oppressed peoples. From the Vatican statement of Pope John XXIII, the phrase that designated the Catholic Church as having a “preferential option for the poor,” was revised to “In the face of the underdeveloped countries, the church is and wants to be, the church of all

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<sup>14</sup> Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Parthenian Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Edward Cleary, *The Cross and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Hensley, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).



and especially the church of the poor.”<sup>17</sup> This new stance embraces the full complexity of those marginalized in societies: the unborn, elderly, women, children, blacks and most currently, homosexuals. The “poor” is now redefined to encompass the collective poor, a much wider category than the proletariat. By this new definition, the Catholic Church was poised to become the conscience of the world with regards to the weak and the disenfranchised.<sup>18</sup>

### *Liberation Theology in America*

Liberation Theology is not the sole expression of Latin Americans theologians. It exists in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Singapore, China, India, and the shores of America. In America, Liberation theology was first presented as black theology. Black liberation theology is based on the biblical liberation motif of Exodus, the prophets and the solidarity of Jesus with the poor. “This Jesus of the biblical and black traditions is not a theological concept but a liberating presence in the lives of the poor in their fight for dignity and worth. This is the Jesus who is the “God of the Oppressed”<sup>19</sup> The energy and insights harnessed during the civil rights struggle dramatically increased the influence of liberation theology resulting in the prolific writings of James Cones. Cones set the tone of liberation theology as systematic theology<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Statement found in the papal address of September 11, 1952 cited in Gibellini Rossini, ed., *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1978), 1121.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> James Cone, *God of The Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).



In part inspired by Black power, the Hispanic group started their “Brown Power” in response to immigration restrictions and the oppressive policies in the US. Hispanic sociopolitical activism was later to include the activities of Caesar Chavez whose efforts resulted in increased rights for agricultural workers in the US. The Hispanic movement snowballed into the Puerto Rican movement resulting in the creation of political rights for Puerto Ricans.<sup>21</sup>

At the time that the Civil Rights Movement in America was responding to the rights of African Americans, interest was drawn to the ongoing and sustained critique of the oppression of the American Indian. Their protests, organized in the 1940’s, were given greater edge during the 1960’s during the civil rights movement. Their efforts, like those of the Civil Rights Movement, secured voting, land, and tribal rights. The spiritual influence encapsulated in the movement became known as the Native American theology. As a result, “a strong and independent Indian identity reemerged.”<sup>22</sup>

Following closely on the heels of these various movements was the rise of Asian-American movements. The overlap and synergy between the late twentieth century struggles for social transformation continued in the Asian American context with Black liberation theology as a strong influence.<sup>23</sup>

The rise of feminism in the United States as a direct result of the influence of Black theology cannot be over emphasized. The earlier wave of feminism was attached to the Abolition Movement and later found influence in the civil rights movement of the

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<sup>21</sup> Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*.

sixties. The theme of full and undiluted rights for women found expression from the work of civil rights movement and led to greater rights for women in the United States. Like in all other movements, this movement resulted in the study of theology solely dedicated to the subject matter, in this context the woman, while subscribing to a spiritual ideology which sees God in the oppressed.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Praxis of Theology*

The researcher's interest in Liberation Theology stems from her belief that the Word of God expressly denounces any form of oppression against poor or vulnerable people in society. Where this oppression exists, the church's mission must include actions, whether political or otherwise, that must reflect God's love for the downtrodden. The church must do something to alleviate sufferings. Liberation theology differs from other theologies in the sense that it is not restricted to intellectual reasoning and discourse on the role of God. Liberation theology is 'doing' theology where worship and service to humanity are fully integrated as one.<sup>25</sup> In doing the good works of God, the Christian's life and conduct, is an indispensable context for theological reflections.

Many liberation theologians echo this belief. Gustavo Gutierrez, in his dialogue, describes liberation theology as a "critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word of God."<sup>26</sup> The praxis is motivated by evangelical values of social justice and

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*.

<sup>25</sup> Miguel De La Torre, *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: Politics and Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Books, 1972).

### *The Contributions of Liberation Theology*

One of the benefits of the Liberation Theology is that it settles the conundrum of handling a faith that is inseparable from the sufferings of people.<sup>30</sup> It elicits and answers the question, “How is it possible to tell the poor, who are forced to live in condition that embody a denial of love, that God loves them?”<sup>31</sup> It reveals God as a deliverer present in the sufferings of his people and forces the actions of groups of people who became catalysts of change in their communities.

As a result of the movement in South America, the issues and struggles of poverty have become more exposed. As the movement grew and caught fire all around the world, people have become more sensitive to the sufferings of groups who are geographically and culturally removed from them.<sup>32</sup> The study of poverty has resulted in significant research into other areas like science, psychiatry and social sciences.<sup>33</sup>

One of the direct benefits of the Latin American liberation theology is the growth and influence of the church. The Church acquired a presence both on the internationally and within local communities.<sup>34</sup> Now, the Church reflects the tangible love of God which accepts all peoples.

Lastly, the span of Liberation Theology is one that gives it a distinctive quality. The rising of Black, Hispanic, and Indian liberation struggles in America from the

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<sup>30</sup> John de Grouchy, *Liberation Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Herdmans, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Bonimon Miguez, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, Books, 1975).

<sup>32</sup> Fern Deane, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

peace. “For faith shows us that in this commitment the grace of Christ plays its part whether or not those who practice it are aware of this fact”<sup>27</sup> Karl Barth, in his litany, asserted that, “the true hearer of the word is the one who puts it into practice”<sup>28</sup>

Unlike other theological studies, liberation theology is concentrated on doing what Jesus will do, which is reaching out to the needy and meeting their needs. A clear example from the scriptures is where Jesus was with the multitudes in the wilderness. The Bible says that Jesus noticed that they were hungry and had compassion on them. He proceeded to feed them. He did not neglect their need but sought to fill it. Matt. 14:14-16. In the same way, churches must rise to meet the needs of strangers in their midst in order to fulfill the mandates of Jesus Christ.

One must be reminded that Liberation Theology is not solely an intellectual pursuit. Behind this movement are people of faith who are increasingly aware that oppression and neglect is contradictory to the faith that they profess in Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal of Liberation Theology is to reflect deeply on the Word of God while applying its values in societal contexts with the aim of entering more deeply into faith in a God who has become part of the human existence and who is also its liberator.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Westminster, England: John Knox Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*.



expressions of Latin American, African, Asian and South Pacific contexts means that, for the first time, theology is being developed from non-European and North American perspectives.<sup>35</sup>

### *Criticisms of Liberation Theology*

One of the criticisms of Liberation Theology is that in some schools of thought, Liberation Theology has evolved into a theology of salvation. This view is buttressed in the idea that the separation between Liberation Theology and the theology of salvation must not exist as both theologies are inexplicably intertwined.<sup>36</sup> According to this view, God's saving action is all encompassing and holistic in nature. The spiritual aspect of the human nature must not be separated from the physical, and consequently the political must not be separated from the religious. "It is the central theme of evangelization. It is the heart of the Lord's saving work and the kingdom of life: it is what the God of the kingdom seeks."<sup>37</sup>

Other schools of thought deviate from this perception in that they believe that the central mission of the church is to preach the gospel. Only after the church maintains this identity can it engage in a dialogue that is fruitful for salvation. This school of thought is afraid that excessive humanism may lead to the church relying on human methods to preach the gospel and possibly deviating from the focus of

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Shaul, *The Reformation and Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Arthur McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



evangelism.<sup>38</sup> This school of thought argues that as Jesus preached the gospel of repentance, he helped the poor and the disenfranchised in society. The word that Jesus preached had the power to change lives and this transformative power ought to be the focus of evangelism. This school of thought also argues that some churches have become so absorbed in humanistic efforts, while overlooking the importance of the word of God, that they have lost their identity as a spiritual body.<sup>39</sup>

The researcher agrees with the first school of thought, which positions the church as the bastion for societal changes. She believes that the gospel must not only be preached, but lived. In the words of the great apostle of charity, St Vincent de Paul, “Charity is the cement which binds communities to God and persons to one another.”<sup>40</sup> The Bible describes the futility of having faith without works. Both concepts of rendering the gospel and social activism ought to be employed to generate an effective dispensation resulting in a more holistic gospel. The researcher cautions against emphasizing evangelism over social activism or vice versa.

Another criticism that is leveled against Liberation Theology is that it sometimes limits God to the context of the present human reality.<sup>41</sup> For example, some black theologians assert that Jesus is black and identifies only with black people, thereby limiting God to their reality. The author does not agree with this assertion. Instead, the author believes that no one group or experience can capture the full essence

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<sup>38</sup> Floyd Thomas and Pinn Anthony, *Liberation Theologies in the United States* (New York, NY: University Press, 1969).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “To Mother de la Trinite in Troyers,” St Vincent de Paul, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.svdpchicago.org/index.php/about-us/history/html>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

of the reality of God. God is present in all groups where oppression is found and even where it is not found. A contrary belief can lend itself to racism and hypocrisy. It could lead to seeing God solely from a political perspective, denying the spiritual and redemptive essence of liberation theology.

### *Conclusion*

This project seeks to discuss the history and relevance of the Theology of Immigration and the Theology of Liberation to the church. These two theological ideologies pertain to how the church welcomes the strangers and argues for greater theological discourse on addressing the needs of strangers in our church communities.

The poor in Liberation Theology represent all marginalized peoples, including the refugees and the migrant. The role of the church is to develop strategies and resources such as teachings, sacraments, worship, service, etc., that will help in the physical, spiritual and emotional developments of these visitors, thereby revealing the true God. Liberation Theology is a way of life that must be lived and experienced, and therein lays its transformative powers.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas and Anthony, *Liberation Theologies in the United States*.

### Biblical Foundation

Many of these refugees can be found in local churches across America. Statistics show that Christian churches and organizations have played a far greater role in welcoming refugees than any other organizations in the United States and the World.<sup>43</sup> The percentage of refugees settling with Christian organizations within the United States is estimated at sixty five percent.<sup>44</sup> However being welcomed to the United States is only a tiny fraction of the help that these refugees need. The barriers of language, cultural assimilation, and education, physical and emotional traumas have produced a myriad of challenges that these new arrivals must resolve. The researcher, a pastor in a congregation that consists mostly of refugees, has identified several challenges inherent in advocating and helping refugees.

A pattern of low self-esteem and positive identity occurs in almost all the refugee members irrespective of their country of origin. Most refugees traumatized by their past horrific experiences and living in a foreign land, generally find their new environment more challenging than their prior settings. They have resorted to viewing themselves as second class citizens, a people without any identity, lost in a foreign country, and not belonging to the larger society.<sup>45</sup> The focus of this biblical foundation section is to expand on the true biblical meaning of a refugee as delineated by God. It seeks to frame a positive self-identity by examining God's original and continuing intent for the stranger.

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<sup>43</sup> Cose, *Nation of Strangers*, 56.

<sup>44</sup> "Landmarks in Immigration History," Digital History, accessed May 15, 2014, [http://www.digital.uh.edu/voices/immigration\\_chron.cfm](http://www.digital.uh.edu/voices/immigration_chron.cfm).

<sup>45</sup> Soerens and Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 179.

The Old Testament refers to the stranger as the “*ger*.” This section also examines God’s instructions to the Israelites and consequently, the Israelites’ treatment and acceptance of strangers within their midst. Finally, this biblical foundation reviews the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament practices towards the newcomers.

The researcher hopes this study provides an understanding of how God expects people to treat the strangers in their midst. To the refugee, she hopes this study will expound on the true meaning of a stranger, helping them to identify the commonality of the human and spiritual immigration experience. This shared experience will impact positively on the refugee’s self-identity. It is hoped that this study will help create an identity that is based not on past experiences but on a future that is built on Christ, our hope of glory. It is Jesus Christ who creates a new identity for *all* believers and it is in Him that believers find their new identity.

### *Origins of Mankind*

There are various schools of thought regarding God’s heart towards immigration and consequently the strangers in our midst. One major school of thought asserts that all of God’s children share a spiritual journey that started in the creation of the earth.<sup>46</sup> Humanity, it is claimed, is a huge migration plan originated from God the Creator, in the Garden of Eden. Since then, humankind is constantly moving to new territories as instructed by the Maker. In Gen.1:26-29, God created man and woman in God’s image with the purpose of multiplying and increasing the earth’s population. Humankind was to

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<sup>46</sup> Joan Maruskin, *Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome* (New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2012), 38.

dominate all the creatures of the earth and was to keep expanding and invading all the frontiers of the earth without geographical limitations. Geographical and physical borders it is claimed are man's attempt to create borders and lines for definition and governance.<sup>47</sup>

The migration and exodus processes are age old phenomenon's experienced across all continents of the world. This reinforces the fact that migration is a natural reaction to the ongoing process of what God created man to become, a caretaker of the earth.<sup>48</sup> Dr. Joan Maruskin, in her book, *Immigration and the Bible*, takes the concept of the creation story as proof of God's migratory intentions to another level. She describes the creation story as the story of human being given the breadth of life and commanded to live in a strange land, the Garden of Eden. Mankind has since immigrated from the Garden of Eden to far-flung continents of the earth, far away from the original Garden. Mankind continues to migrate. Scripturally we can trace our ancestry back to Adam and Eve, yet we have migrated from that central location and ancestry to our present locations.<sup>49</sup>

Irrespective of anyone's understanding of God's original migratory plan, it cannot be disputed that God did not originally create geographical boundaries, and that mankind was given the freewill to populate and dominate the earth wherever they found themselves.

### *The Old Testament and Migration*

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<sup>47</sup> Joan Maruskin, *Immigration and the Bible: A Guide for Radical Welcome* (New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2012), 129.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 38.

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy 26:1-9).

*God's People: A Wandering People*

The Old Testament is replete with stories of one wave of migration after the other by the Israelites. God's people were a moving people. From Noah to the patriarch Abraham, who was called to a land he did not know (Canaan); to Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, Joshua, etc. Each person was moved to change locations and to settle with sometimes very hostile or indifferent people. These journeys were often fraught with difficulties, but God was always with His people providing reassurance and encouragement. He removes every vestige of fear that naturally follows relocation. It is interesting to note that in some circumstances, it is God who physically moved His people to a new place for their protection. Noah, for example, was removed from his people and placed in an ark, for his protection. When the ark rested on Mount Ararat, God blessed Noah and his family and reiterated the same command given in the Garden of Eden that they were to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. (Gen.1:26-28)

The generation of Noah through his sons Japheth, Shem and Ham, did just that. They continued the process of multiplying and migrating until they came to the Tower of Babel, where tongues were divided and different languages filled the earth. (Gen.11:1-9) This separation at the Tower of Babel is significant because these individuals had decided to stay where they were and to not relocate.

The story of the Israelites in Egypt is perhaps the best example of a people in migration. Long after the death of Joseph the Israelites suffered great persecution under the hand of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The Egyptian Pharaohs and rulers exerted great afflictions on the Israelites. They killed their first born sons and made them work in inhumane conditions. They enslaved the Israelites and subjected them to discrimination

and marginalization. God told Moses that the cry of the Israelites in bondage had reached His ear and that He was set to deliver them. The epic story of their deliverance from the Egyptian rulers and God's dramatic rescue by way of the Red Sea can only be imagined. God led them through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He tended them, cared for them, and provided for their needs through the rough desert terrain. (Exod.15:1-27) They finally entered the Promised Land after facing adverse and difficult situations in the wilderness.

### *The Wandering Aramean*

The multitudes of people that left Egypt going to Canaan were described as a "mixed multitude." (Exod.12:3) In the nation that was to be built, there were groups of people that were not originally Hebrews or from the twelve tribes of Israel. Some of these mixed people had been displaced, conquered, or they willingly assimilated into Israelite communities and would become a part of God's people and nation. There was a need to instruct God's people about these newcomers. Having entered the Promised Land, it was important that the Israelites understood that they had also been strangers in another land. Perhaps it is through the instructions given by God to the Israelites that one can understand the heart of God towards the newcomers to Israel.

As can be gleaned from the following texts and commentaries, the newcomers were intrinsically valued by God. God's compassion for them is evident in the instructions that were given to the Israelites in the Torah. The identity of the Jewish people is intertwined with that of the strangers since they were themselves once strangers



in the land.<sup>50</sup> The instruction from the book of Deut. 26:5 regarding the identity of the future new settlers in Canaan, above referenced, is one of the most often quoted verses in the Bible and in the Jewish world and tradition.<sup>51</sup> It is a quote that defines the identity of God's people as a "wandering Aramean". It is part of the Jewish Torah which was the law given to the Israelites when they were brought out of Egypt. It was given to a generation who had been wandering in the desert and God was about to bless them and bring them to the new land. They had very fresh memories of oppression, suffering, and slavery and God did not want them to forget from where they came from after they were settled, a condition which is common to man. God knew the heart of man and how man often forgets from where he had come from after he is richly blessed of God.<sup>52</sup>

The Israelites were to say the following before presenting their offerings to the priest: (v. 3) "I declare this day to the Lord my God that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us." (v. 3) This Affirmation was designed to remind them to acknowledge that God had blessed them as was promised. (v. 5) "My father was a wandering Aramean and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number but there he became a great, mighty and a populous nation." They were to remember their history of ostracism, rejection, persecution and slavery and to never forget their past (v. 5). They were to also remind themselves that, "The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders." (v. 8)

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<sup>50</sup> David Engelhard, *The Lord's Motivated Concern for the Underprivileged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Hoxener, *Changing Concepts of the "Stranger" in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Buffalo Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

As they recalled the pain of the past they were also to declare what God had done for them in this new place with the following reminder, "I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow." (v. 18). Their first fruits were to be placed in a basket (v. 2), and was to be given to the Levite, the widow, orphan, and alien. The Levites or priest were designated to take care of the temple and therefore needed to be financially supported. In addition there were widows, orphans alien, and foreigner or newcomer to Nation of Israel. These individuals by the nature of their immediate circumstances were unable to take care of their own needs. God was telling these former strangers to remember their former identity as strangers, and to be careful to take care of the newer strangers and the most vulnerable in their midst. God called their ancestors, "*wandering Armenians*," a subtle derogatory term intended to remind them of the fact that their own ancestors migrated from another land.

This passage is subject to different interpretations. For most commentators, the "wandering father" is identified as Jacob.<sup>53</sup> The passage fits into the story of Jacob when he went down to Egypt with his sons during a period of famine and there his descending generations were subjected to brutality by the wicked Pharaoh. Another translation characterizes the ancestor as Abraham who was instructed to travel from the land of Canaan to Egypt and subsequently was told that his generations will suffer in the land of Egypt.<sup>54</sup> Another translation of this scripture translates the passage, "My father was a wandering Aramean" (*arami oved avi*) very differently. By changing the vocalization of the Hebrew *oved* (wandering) to *ibed* (destroyed), they render the text to mean: "An

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<sup>53</sup> David Kirk and Michael Healy, "Entertaining Angels: Hospitality Essence of Eastern Christian Lifestyles," *Diakonia* 16, no 2 (1980: 104-117).

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Lewis, *Jehovah's International Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 125.

Aramean sought to destroy my father.” In some Jewish tradition, this would-be murderer is identified as Laban who, by threatening Jacob attempted to “destroy the fabric of the Jewish nation.”<sup>55</sup>

The conventional interpretation of this passage however, lends credence to the widely accepted understanding of the “wandering Aramean” as wandering refugees, sojourners and strangers, a term commonly referred to as a “ger.” This interpretation as well identifies the wandering ancestor as Abraham rather than Jacob. Besides the hermeneutics involved, one is struck by the two spiritual models suggested by these respective translations. One model highlights the wanderings of the Israelites and their past identity as wanderers. The second model suggests that the Jewish people essentially are a hunted and hated people, forever on the run from those who would seek their destruction.<sup>56</sup> This description fits neatly into the description of the refugee as a people fleeing persecution and being hunted by the enemies of their lives.

### *The “Ger” or Sojourner*

A major translation of Deut.26:5 reads, “My father was a homeless refugee.”<sup>57</sup> The word “ger” means a stranger, sojourner, and a resident alien”. It is frequently used to refer to the non-Israelite newcomer who has willingly or unwillingly placed themselves under Israelite protection but without legal rights. A good example of a willing “ger” is

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<sup>55</sup> Chase Ufford, “Seeking God’s Justice for People on the Move” *Church & Society Presbyterian Magazine*, August 29, 2005, 30.

<sup>56</sup> David Engelhard, *The Lord’s Motivated Concern for the Underprivileged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary), 183.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Ramsey, *The Biblical Norm of Righteousness* (Los Angeles, CA: Ventura Press, 2006), 159.

Ruth. She was a Moabite by birth and a worshipper of a foreign god who willingly agreed to go back to the land of the Jews and to accept the God of the Israelites as her God. She was later to become the grandmother of King David and is named in the genealogy of Christ. Another good example is Rehab, the prostitute, who subjected herself and her family to the mercies of Joshua and the invading Israelite army. She became a part of David's' ancestry, and is also named in the genealogy of Christ. (Matt.1:5-6) In both examples each woman chose to adopt the Jewish nation as their new homeland and acknowledged the God of the Jews as their God.

The verb root of the word “ger” is also descriptive of a person dwelling as a newcomer without original rights. This root word is used a few times when Abraham dwelt in the land of the Philistines in Gen. 21:34 and when Abraham went to Egypt in Gen.12:10. In this sense the word “ger” may also be used to describe the Israelites. They who were residents in a foreign land. When Moses' son was born, he named him Gershom meaning, “I have been a ger in a foreign land” (Exod.2:22) One can see that the descriptive term “*ger*” used in the passage describes the Israelites and their ancestor. It is the same term used in describing the various visitors to the Jewish nation. Using the same term for both His people as well as the newcomers, God is telling them not to create hurtful distinctions between themselves and newcomers.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Hoxener, *Changing Concepts of the “Stranger” in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Buffalo Press, 2003), 87.

*The “Ger” and the Righteousness of God*

As time went by extending hospitality to the stranger in the Hebrew community became a hallmark of the Kingdom of God and of one’s righteousness. Abraham, Job, Boaz and the widow of Zarephat are all examples of people who showed hospitality to strangers and were blessed for their actions. The Israelites saw the custom of hospitality not only as a covenant obligation but a direct obedience to the expectations of God. These expectations were carefully detailed in the book of Deuteronomy and Leviticus and echoed by every prophet that spoke in rebuke to the nation of Israel. In Deuteronomy 26, God clearly reveals that He considers the plight of the stranger the same as His people when they were in the wilderness. In the same chapter, God mandated that the tithes of His house must be allotted to the widows, Levites, orphans and aliens. The provisions for food (Levi.19:9 -10); the Right to Glean (Deut.24:19-21); Sabbatical Year (Exod.23:11); Financial Provisions (Lev.25:35); Feast Day privileges (Deut.16:11); Court house Privileges (Exod.22:21); are all indications that God carefully considered the plight of the stranger and made provision for them in His new nation.

A curse was placed on any who violated these rules. In Deut.27:17, a curse is placed on anyone who deprives the aliens, widows and orphans justice. Later in Isaiah 58, God told them that their fasting and mourning had become abhorrent in His sight because of their pattern of mistreating the weak including the aliens. He informed them that their fasting had been rejected. It is clear from these referenced verses that God had expressed his holiness to his people and expected them to pattern their lives in accordance to it. He declared to them in Leviticus 19, “I am Holy, be thou Holy.” His holiness meant that He was not in favor of partiality or the mistreatment of the weak.

Loving the stranger is an expression of God's nature because the act itself denotes love and God is an expression of love. God also acts fairly towards all His creation. Evil is a contradictory to the nature of God. Thus He warned them not to mistreat the alien among them and to love them as themselves. Israel must pattern their lives after God if they are to live as Kingdom citizens. They must separate themselves from the practices of the surrounding nations who were wicked and unjust and become holy like their God. God's holiness demanded that they leave the gleanings of the field and vineyard for the poor and alien (Lev.19:4), to not pervert justice to the alien (Lev.19:15), and to love the alien as if he were a native born (Lev.19:23-24) etc.<sup>59</sup>

### *Strangers No More*

The humanitarian attitude that God expected of the Israelites dealt not only with the basic rights of the "ger" but extended to treating the "ger" as they treated one another. In Exod.10:19, God commanded the Israelites to love them and to consider the "gers" as they would themselves. The "ger" are to be treated as a human with feelings and emotions.

As a result, In Exod.23: 9, God made an interesting comment regarding the heart of the stranger, "*You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.*"

The heart of the stranger is one that is afraid and seeks acceptance. It is a heart that desperately wants to belong to the larger society. It is a heart that questions his or her identity in the larger society, and that seeks redress from God for the past wrongs. God

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<sup>59</sup> Hoxener, *Changing Concepts of the Stranger in the Old Testament*, 87.

knew this and had seen the effects that pain and trauma had on the Israelites while they were in Egypt. God wanted to spare the “gers” the emotional and psychological pain of the past and create avenues for full acceptance into the Jewish communities.<sup>60</sup>

Later on in the Psalms, there is a collection of songs depicting the heart of the “gers” or strangers which is now embedded in Jewish history. These pilgrim Psalms found in Psalms chapters 120 to 134 address the hurt and disappointments of the “gers” both within Israel and in the foreign lands where Israelites were exiled.<sup>61</sup> Even while in exile, God continually warned the Israelites to treat the “gers” with consideration. The pre and post exilic prophets Amos, Elijah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah, all warned the people about their treatment of the strangers and aliens. Even in a foreign land, the prophets warned the people of God’s wrath against all who practice injustice towards society most vulnerable citizens. (Mal.3:5)

The latter chapters of the Old Testament indicate that the “gers” were eventually given full assimilation rights into the Jewish communities. The final process involved the traditional circumcision rites which granted full membership. The “ger” may observe the Passover (Exod.12:19, Num.9:14); offer burnt offerings (Num.15:14); and are entitled to the cities of refuge. (Num.35:15)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Arthur Lewis, *Jehovah’s International Love* (St Paul, MI: John Knox Press, 1998), 23.

<sup>61</sup> James Linburg, *Psalms for the Sojourners* (Minneapolis, MI: John Knox Press, 1986), 82.

<sup>62</sup> Hoxener, *Changing Concepts of the Stranger in the Old Testament*, 65.

### *The New Testament and Migration*

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the oppressed and to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord. (Luke 4:14)

These bold statements began the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. In this Jewish temple of worship, His statements provoked an outrage that almost led to his being killed. Jesus talked about the prophets Elijah and Elisha ministering to non-Jews and reiterated the fact that His ministry is not based on a merit system but is inclusive of all peoples. To the skeptical Jews, Jesus was making outrageous statements about extending the borders of His ministry and God's love to everyone irrespective of race, color or creed. His declaration was offensive to the average Jew in that they regarded themselves as Abraham's children and thus the arbiter of God's laws. Statements that seem to eliminate the special position that the Jews occupied with God sounded heretical to them.

The ministry of Jesus was clearly extended to all categories of peoples. This meant that acceptance and inclusion were extended to all the people including the strangers who came to Him for assistance. Jesus healed the ten lepers, one a foreigner; He healed the daughter of the Sydo-Phoenician woman, He healed the servant of the Roman centurion, Jairus and many others who were non-native Jews.

### *The Stranger in the New Testament*

By the time that Jesus walked on the streets of Palestine, the Jewish people had forsaken all the Old Testament admonishments of hospitality towards strangers. They set



up societal barriers that made it impossible for Samaritans, newcomers and “unclean” people to fit into the society. People who were not of Jewish origins were “racially profiled” and discriminated against. For example, when Jesus requested water from the Samaritan woman in John 4:9, she responds, “How is it that thou, being a Jew asks a drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans?” Evidently, it had become common knowledge that the Jews despised the Samaritans, making Jesus’ request a mystery to her.

Jesus’ teachings and interactions with strangers reintroduced the acceptance of the stranger and resulted in a strong hatred towards Him. He was derided by the Pharisees as the rabbi who ate and mingled with “sinners.” Jesus actions tore through the boundaries and walls the society had erected to separate the “true” Jew from other people.

The meaning of the word “stranger” in the Hebrew is not the exact same meaning as the Greek word for the same word in the New Testament. The Greek word for stranger is “xenos” meaning “a guest” Matt.25:25. Another common word for stranger is “allotrois” which can be translated to “alien” or “belonging to another.” (Matt.17:25-26; John10:5)

It is important to note that these words describing a stranger are commonly used within the concept of hospitality. The word hospitality means a love for stranger and Jesus taught that kindness to strangers is an indication of the transformed life. The transformed life extends hospitality beyond one’s friends and family. In Luke14:12-14, Jesus preached that kindness must be meted out to those who need it and not to those who can repay us back or even deserve it. He cautioned the disciples in Matt.5:46-47: “For if you love those who love you, what rewards have you? Do not even the tax collectors do

the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”

Jesus affirmed the teachings of the Torah regarding the “strangers” or “gers” with the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. He linked the concept of love for our neighbor and love for the alien or stranger with the parable. Our neighbor, He declared, is any and all persons and we must love them the same way we love ourselves. To a society that had remained racially and ethnically divided irrespective of God’s admonitions in the Old Testament, Jesus statements stung like a bee sting. For the Jews, the Samaritans were not only foreigners but long standing enemies with whom the Jews did not relate.

The ministry of acceptance that Jesus extended to the oppressed people like the strangers, aliens, refugees, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized is intended to help them to understand that God attaches value to them. God has not changed in His love for the stranger even though the Jews had shifted from His earlier admonitions.

It is this unconditional love and acceptance that Jesus professed when the Pharisees asked Him, “*Which is the greatest commandment in the law?*” (Matt.22: 36-40) His response was that one should love God and that one should love his neighbor as himself. According to Jesus, loving God and loving one’s neighbor were the most important commandments in the law. It is the litmus test of being righteous with God and the standard Jesus expects from His followers.<sup>63</sup> The standard has not changed from the Old Testament despite the distortions practiced in the Jewish society. Jesus stated in the gospels, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law but to fulfill it.” (Matt.5:17)

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<sup>63</sup> William Herzon, *Parables as Subversive Speech; Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 33.

The new formation of believers in the Kingdom of God, led by Jesus Christ, began at the Pentecost. In Acts chapter 2, after the resurrection of Jesus, the believers gathered at the Pentecost in the upper chambers to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The gathering consisted of Jews born in Partia, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and “strangers of Rome.” (Acts 2:11)

Like the Israelites, when they left Egypt, these new believers were a mixed group consisting of Jews and “strangers.” On this day, the Holy Ghost fell on all who were present, Jews and non-Jews alike. They spoke with strange tongues and languages. The result of this spiritual encounter was the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the genesis of the Christian religion. (Acts chapters 1 and 2)

Again, like in the Old Testament, there was a need to coach the new believers about the universality of God’s love and acceptance of all people into God’s kingdom. Just like the Israelites may not mistreat the strangers who were living in their midst, so also were the new believers in Christ. Starting with the vision of Peter, God began to tear down all barriers of acceptance towards the non-Jewish believers, the gentiles and the strangers included. Peter, one of the early leaders of the new group of believers was gently cautioned by God in a vision to refuse any division in the gathering of the new converts. Acts 10:1-45. God told him not to call unholy what God had cleaned. He was ordered to extend the gospel to Cornelius a Gentile resident in Israel. Cornelius, whose heart was devoted towards God, had as much rights to salvation as did the Jews. Peter in obedience extended the gospel to the household of Cornelius, leading to the salvation of the first Gentile family into the new kingdom.

The eyes of Peter were now opened to the extension of God's love to all peoples, a concept he earlier abhorred.<sup>64</sup> Peter goes further to propagate the universality of God's love to all believers who he now considers as "strangers" in his writings to the church. In the book of I Pet.2:11, Peter admonished the Jews in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia to remember that they are "strangers" and "pilgrims" residing in the Gentile world. The Jewish converts were not only physical strangers in the Diaspora but were also spiritual strangers whose lifestyle must be different from the unbelievers around them. From Peters' new perspective, all believers are strangers in this life and must live their lives accordingly. Believers in the body of Christ are facing the same common enemy.

Paul in his ministry addresses the issues of strangers and non-Jewish converts. In fact, Paul considered himself the Apostle to the Gentiles or the non-Jews and the strangers as they would have been called in the New Testament. His conversion experience included a mandate from Jesus in a vision to bear His name, "...among the Gentiles, and Kings and the Children of Israel." (Acts 9:15)

Starting with the new Jewish believers, Paul reaffirmed God's acceptance and love for non-Jewish believers in Rome. At this time, Peter an elder and an Apostle in the church was still dealing with his hesitation in accepting non-Jewish believers. Paul confronted Peter for his hypocrisy and expressed disapproval towards Peter for not standing boldly on what he knew was right. (Gal.2:11-20)

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<sup>64</sup> Andrew Anterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts* (Dallas, TX: Baylor University Press), 51.

Further, Paul in Galatia reaffirmed the inclusion of all believers into the Kingdom of God through faith and not by works, a doctrine propagated by the Jewish believers in Galatia. Faith, according to Paul is what justified all sinners in Christ and not one's ancestry or religious practices. The believers in Galatia were bewitched and were reverting to their earlier beliefs and practices. (Galatians chapters 3 and 4)

Like Jesus, Paul's preached a gospel of inclusiveness evoking the ire of the Jewish people and ultimately bringing about his death sentence. In Acts chapters 21 and 22, the account of Paul's confrontation by the Jews in Asia for bringing Greeks into the temple clearly exemplifies the Jewish oppositions against the gospel of inclusiveness. Paul was thrown out of the synagogue in Jerusalem for bringing in "strangers" of Greek origin into the temple of God, thereby polluting the temple. Paul's actions caused such a stir in the city that he was almost killed except for the quick interventions of the chief captain. (Gal.2:1-30) Apparently the early church was seriously opposed to the inclusion of non-Jewish believers. This was a reflection of the societal trend of the time.

However, despite the earlier opposition to "strangers" in the gospel, the Disciples of Christ imbibed His teachings and acceptance of strangers as a cardinal reference of the transformed life. The early church practiced the love and acceptance of strangers. They shared their possessions with those in need and ate food together with gladness and simplicity of heart. (Acts 2:44) In the book of Rom.12:13, the believers were urged to be "given to hospitality." The word "given" translated means to pursue or seek aggressively. All opportunities to extend kindness to Jews and non-Jews alike were to be employed in the building of the new kingdom of God.

In the new kingdom, the love for stranger has been elevated to a higher degree of commitment reflecting the original desires of God towards the “gers” in the Old Testament. In the book of Heb.13:2, the writer encourages the believers to not forget to welcome strangers, for by doing so people have entertained angels without knowing it. The obvious reference to the story of Abraham’s entertainment of strangers in Gen.18:1-8 is a reflection of God's desire and consequently Jesus’ desire for believers to care, to love, and to show hospitality to strangers.

In the new kingdom, Jesus defined the characteristics of those who will inherit the kingdom of God. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matt.25:35-36) Christianity is redefined in the context of our treatment of others because when believers serve others, they serve Jesus Christ. (Matt.25:40)

The story of the life of Jesus is exemplified as being both an alien and extending hospitality to the stranger. As an alien or stranger on earth, He left the glory of heaven and, “Made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness,” Phil.2:7. Since Jesus came from above, He did not belong to the earth but came to stay with His own who rejected Him. (John 1:11)

Dr. Joan Maruskin in her book, *Immigration and the Bible* characterizes the story of Jesus as that of stranger or immigrant with all its perplexities. According to her, “Jesus came from heaven to be incarnated as a marginalized child of an unwed teen. He took the form of a human being and became a refugee, immigrant and at times an undocumented

Christ for the sake of our salvation.”<sup>65</sup> Maruskin further stipulates that at the beginning of His life, Jesus fled to Egypt as a refugee or asylum seeker and that at the end of His life, Jesus was crucified outside the gates of the city because he was not a Roman citizen.<sup>66</sup>

Dr. Maruskin hints on a theory that the experiences of Jesus must have taught him something about being a stranger. He was born in a stable, among lowly peasants and animal. His birth was announced to shepherds who traditionally move from one location to another. The news of His birth was also given to Magis, strangers from the East who subsequently travelled to Jerusalem to see the child king. Without travel documents, Jesus and His family crossed the border, to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. In Matt.4:13, Jesus is noted to have left Nazareth and made His home in Capernaum by the sea. With His disciples, He migrated throughout the area, often interacting with all types of people. This “cross-cultural” lifestyle, Dr. Maruskin argues impacted the ministry of Jesus, making Him a more compassionate rabbi.<sup>67</sup>

The researcher agrees with this theory that Jesus lived like a stranger and most likely learned many lessons from his migrant lifestyle. Jesus acknowledged in Luke 9:58 that, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nest but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head.” He himself was often a stranger in cities and countryside of Palestine as He walked along preaching the gospel to all that were present.<sup>68</sup> His disciples were called

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<sup>65</sup> Maruskin, *Immigration and the Bible*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>67</sup> Maruskin, *Immigration and the Bible*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> Amy Odem, *God’s Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 1173.

to follow Him, leaving everything to follow Him. They lived and interacted with marginalized people and lived in the deserts, mountains and lakesides.

The researcher proposes that Jesus' compassion for the strangers is because of His Divinity. The Bible argues that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is the God who cared for His children and brought them out of slavery. He is the God who took them through the deserts, cared and protected them until they came to the land of Canaan. He is the God who is mindful of the heart of the stranger and provided assurances of His protection. He is the God who made specific rules and statues regarding the status of the alien, granting those privileges and protections. When He came to the Jewish people in the New Testament, He remained the same God who has always cared for the strangers.

The gospel writers had different interpretations of Jesus as a "stranger." Luke in his rendition of the gospel characterizes Jesus as the stranger who visits humanity to offer them salvation. His visit and offer of salvation was rejected by His own.<sup>69</sup> Matthew in his gospel portrays Jesus as an immigrant in fulfillment of the scripture, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Matt.2:15) Notwithstanding one's interpretation of Jesus' role as an immigrant, it is clear from the gospels that strangers held a special place in the heart of Jesus.

Paul asserts in the epistles that in the kingdom of God all believers are "strangers or pilgrims," and says in Eph.2:12-19 that all believers and converts to Christ were once aliens and strangers separated from God. Believers were all illegals and lawbreakers in need of compassion, and Christ invited them into His house. Jesus invited and showed

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<sup>69</sup> Van Thanh Nguyen, *In Solidarity with the Strangers: The Flight into Egypt* (Boston, MA: Island Press, 2003).



believers hospitality by adopting them into the family of God. The adoption into the Kingdom of God means that the new believers no longer belong to the world, but to Christ. They are now members of a new family of believers with a new identity in Christ. Their past has been wiped away in Christ.

Given that new converts did not belong to the earth, they are viewed as pilgrims on a journey to heaven, which is their final destination. The new believers are citizens of heaven and not of this earth. Paul exemplified this new role as a citizen of heaven. As a Roman citizen, Paul had great privileges and legal protections. Paul could have depended on his citizenship for protection and access. Instead he denies all earthly privileges for the higher privileges of being a heavenly citizen. He reminds believers that their citizenship as Christians is in heaven. In sum, as a resident alien on earth, the believer's new identity transcends issues of race, gender and economic condition. In this new identity as Christ's believers and heavenly citizens, all peoples are accepted, loved and valued by God.<sup>70</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The statement by Jesus reflected in Luke 4:14, is the beginning of His ministry and gives a clear indication of his mission statement. Jesus came for all people including the broken hearted e. g. refugees and the captives. Those who receive Him and accept His teachings find their new identity in Him. This new identity propels the believer to receive salvation, wholeness, healing and restoration that is offered in Christ Jesus, irrespective of race, class, citizenship, or color. To the refugee believer, embracing and accepting the

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<sup>70</sup> John Elliot, *The Church as a Counterculture: A Home for the Homeless and a Sanctuary for Refugees* (Los Angeles, CA: Ventura Press, 1998), 42.

healing and redemptive graces of Jesus will help form a positive identity which no other person or system can offer.

To the believers in Christ, hospitality to the newcomers is a reflection of a people who like the Jewish people, have been strangers and welcomed into the household of God. The church should be the safest place on earth for people who are strangers. If the church is unwelcoming to strangers, refugees and “gers” then the heavenly citizenship will be limited both in size and scope, in its offer of salvation. That is not the gospel Jesus came to offer.<sup>71</sup>

### **Historical Foundation**

The story of the migration of the Mennonites into North America is the story of an evolution from alienation to integration, from ethnicity to acculturation. The Mennonite migration story encompasses decades of gradual assimilation into the mainstream American culture. This paper reveals that assimilation is possible for refugees or strangers who are willing to adapt to their new societies. The process of assimilation becomes even easier when the fleeing strangers share the same spiritual identity with those in the land of their liberty.

It is necessary to state at the onset that there exist sharp controversies about the proper terminology for describing Mennonites. They are either described only as a religious denomination with members of different ethnic origins or as both an ethnic group and a religious denomination. These ambiguities stem from their history as a group whose religious beliefs underscored all aspects of their culture and history. The

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<sup>71</sup> Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 15.

researcher's opinion, based from research, is that the Mennonites are both a religious and ethnic group.<sup>72</sup>

The story of the Mennonites in Europe can be likened to the story of the Israelites in Egypt. The Mennonites were severely persecuted because of their faith and mistreated continually by leaders of the various states that they fled to for protection. The Mennonites had certain core beliefs that they rigidly adhered to which resulted in oppositions and mistreatments. For example, they believed that Christians have direct and equal access to the Bible and to God, and are Priests of God. This belief is a direct contradiction to the Roman Catholic doctrines prevalent at this time and incurred the ire of the church run government.<sup>73</sup>

Further, the Mennonites believed that Baptism was to be made by those who had made a conscious decision to follow Jesus. As a result of this belief, the Mennonites were referred to as Anabaptists meaning "against baptism." Again this belief is in contradiction to the beliefs of the mainline Catholic churches that were in authority. Mennonites also believe in the supremacy of the Bible and eschewed discipline as a lifestyle. Mennonites are pacifists who refuse to fight in wars or take up arms even when ordered by the State. Mennonite believers were urged to not conform to the world and live a lifestyle of separateness, avoiding materialism.<sup>74</sup>

The Mennonite's beliefs and lifestyle resulted in great persecution and opposition from the various countries and communities where they resided. From Germany to

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<sup>72</sup> "Who are the Mennonites?" *Mennonite Historical Society of Canada*, accessed Jan 12, 2013, <http://www.mhsc.ca/mennos/main.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Collin Dyck, *An Introduction to Anabaptist History* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981).

<sup>74</sup> Richard M. MacMaster, *Land, Piety and Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 63.

Switzerland, the leaders and members of the Mennonites groups were targeted and killed. The rulers admitted the Mennonites into their states because they were honest, hardworking and peaceful. Quite often, their religious practices upset the powerful state churches at which point the rulers would renege on exemptions for military service, or a new monarch would take power, and the Mennonites would be forced to flee for their lives again, usually leaving everything but their families behind.<sup>75</sup>

In a new state, Mennonites depended on the will of the ruling monarch for protection and sustenance. When the soil was poor and no one else could farm the land, they were invited to farm the land in exchange for exemption from mandatory military service. After the land was cultivated, they were often denied rights, facing fresh persecutions all over. Since the rulers needed them to tend the lands, they were not driven away but would be forced to stay, while at the same time severely limiting their freedoms. Mennonites had to build their churches facing onto back streets or alleys, and they were forbidden from announcing the beginning of services with the sound of a bell like other churches.<sup>76</sup>

Mennonites faced high taxes that were enacted in exchange for both continuing the military service exemption, and to keep the states' best farmers from leaving. In some cases, the entire congregation would give up their belongings to pay the tax to be allowed to leave. If a member or family could not afford the tax, it was often paid by others in the group.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> MacMaster, *Land, Piety and Peoplehood*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Mennonites were named after Menno Simons, a Catholic priest who was converted to the new faith in 1536. Simons left the Catholic Church, became a pacifist, and the leader of the Mennonites. At this time, the Mennonites had given up the confrontational, evangelistic style of the early Anabaptists. They evolved from and were seeking places and communities that practiced tolerance and the possibility of practicing their faith with a minimum of resistance.<sup>78</sup>

The Mennonite groups were forced to evolve into a migrating people. The harsh persecutions from various rulers forced them to move from place to place seeking tolerance and security. Ironically, it is out of the experience of persecution that the Mennonite groups were redefined and their values expressed. They were forced to remain in ethnic clusters in response to the persecutions. The alienation allowed them to retain their native languages and cultures in the new places they relocated to. It also marked them as different. As years went by, their culture became crystallized and ingrained resulting in the creation of a distinct ethnic enclave.<sup>79</sup>

These series of migrations solidified their desire to separate from the larger community. As they migrated to new areas, they tended to take on the languages of the Pennsylvania Dutch and Low German, while remaining distinct from their new surroundings. Separation was easier when the outside world spoke a different language.

The circumstances that the Mennonites faced helped them develop a strong sense of community. They learned to live simply as they were frequently asked to give up

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> John K. Roth, *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).

possessions in order to retain individual freedoms. Their simplicity was reflected both in the home and at church. Their dress and their buildings were plain and their music was simple German chorales performed a cappella. This style of music serves as a reminder to many Mennonites of their simple lives, as well as their history as a persecuted people.<sup>80</sup>

In the early part of the sixteenth century, some groups of Mennonites moved from Switzerland and Germany where they escaped to avoid religious persecution. They fled to America and Russia where it was believed there was more religious tolerance. The groups that settled in America came to the colony of Pennsylvania. They came on an offer by William Penn of 5,000 acres of land and the promise of a freedom to practice their religion. The leader of the group from Krefeld, Germany, Mennonite Francis Daniel Pastorius brought the followers to Pennsylvania in 1683 and founded Germantown, the pioneer German settlement in America and now part of the city of Philadelphia. Numerous other German groups followed, and by the American Revolution there were 100,000 Germans in William Penn's former colony, more than a third of Pennsylvania's total population at the time.<sup>81</sup>

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the Mennonite groups that fled to Russia came to North America settling in Pennsylvania and in some of the mid-western states. These groups from Russia had faced severe persecution before Holland accepted them in their country. These people migrated to the Danzig area on the Baltic Sea. They spoke Dutch and over the years they began speaking the local German dialect known as Low German. While in Holland, the Low Germans

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<sup>80</sup> MacMaster, *Land, Piety and Peoplehood*.

<sup>81</sup> James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989).

found a measure of tolerance but in 1172, sovereignty was transferred from Poland to Prussia and the toleration lessened. The new rulers exerted pressure on the Mennonites to participate in the military and placed increasing restrictions on their land ownership. The persecutions that followed resulted in their fleeing to North America.

The different migration periods resulted in the Mennonites having different cultural heritages. Mennonites brought with them, their languages, German and a Low German dialect called Plautdietsch, food, clothing, and distinct cultural identifications. Today, Mennonite populations are predominantly located in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas while some Mennonites live in different parts of the United States and the world.<sup>82</sup>

Like their European ancestors, the Mennonites who came to the United States lived an isolated existence maintaining many of the ethnic practices of their ancestors which included the use of the German language. They remained isolated throughout the nineteenth century and beyond in some communities.<sup>83</sup> However, gradually they did become more acculturated, with the process being greatly accelerated in the twentieth century.<sup>84</sup>

Starting in the late 1800s, the Mennonites began assimilating with the broader American culture and that process gained momentum down to the present-day. Various reasons have been tendered for the rapidly growing assimilation that began to occur at

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<sup>82</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> John C. Lederach, *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peace Building* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

this time. One of the main factors contributing to this process has been the religious toleration and acceptance that the Mennonites have found in the United States.

Mennonites today have shifted from their more conservative and radical beginnings, even though they have preserved some of the conservative beliefs. They still believe in the close textual readings of the Scriptures and a personal spiritual responsibility as the basis of their faith. Pacifism which is one of the cornerstones of the Mennonite faith is still maintained and practiced, prompting many young Mennonites to elect service to the church rather than military service. The various wars of the United States, especially the Revolutionary War and the Civil War tested Mennonite pacifism, though these values were ultimately strengthened.

In general, many of their beliefs now encompass wider spectrums of beliefs as they have accepted their new identities in America. Many Mennonite congregations adopted Evangelical and Pentecostal church practices such as revival meetings, foreign missions, beginning of Sunday school programs, and the publication of religious literature. There are Mennonite churches that have lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) chapters and some that ordain women. These are strong shifts from past practices. The practice of believer's baptism has been slightly modified. Mennonites accept membership transfers from churches that baptize infants without re-baptism. The age for baptizing children of the church has tended to get younger. Conversion and not baptism seem to be the focus, a tradition that was absorbed from the Evangelical churches.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*.



After speaking their various forms of German for hundreds of years, Mennonites have now become a mainly English speaking group. The removal of the language barrier has opened Mennonites to outside influences, both from secular society and other Christian traditions.<sup>86</sup> Their unique pattern of dress has now changed. For the Mennonites who came to North America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and formed the Mennonite Church, dressing in plain and simple clothes, characteristics of the era, is almost a thing of the past.<sup>87</sup>

Education has played a key role in the acculturation of the Mennonites. The Mennonites have sought for and received great investments in education, especially in the higher education arena. There is a widespread increase in colleges, universities, graduate schools and seminaries built by the Mennonites communities all over the United States. Mennonites are also attending non-Mennonite higher institutions and have increasingly chosen to enter professional careers in contrast to their earlier attachment to farming.<sup>88</sup>

Inter-marriage is another aspect that has resulted to acculturation and loss of ethnicity in Mennonite communities. Marriage between Mennonites and non-Mennonites were initially resisted but with time these concerns have been relaxed. This change has resulted in the increase of non-Mennonites joining Mennonite churches. Combined with this factor is the greater visibility of Mennonites in American culture, resulting in many non-ethnics Mennonites joining Mennonite churches by choice.<sup>89</sup> Finally, with farming careers, a past event, Mennonites have become more urbanized leaving behind the rural

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Pam C. Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996).

<sup>88</sup> Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970*.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

culture of the past. Mennonites communities are gradually disappearing and their ties to ethnicity are disappearing as well.

The Mennonites who migrated to North America did prosper as a result of the increased stability and security they were offered. Mennonites joined with their North American neighbors in accumulating possessions. They have also played visible roles in America. They are credited with helping create the non-consenters laws in America. This has resulted in the increase in nonviolent political activism. This involvement has not been widespread, but it has received worldwide exposure and reflects a sense of responsibility for the affairs of the world that was not characteristic of earlier generations of Mennonites.<sup>90</sup>

Their involvement in social causes is highly commendable. Their disaster relief agencies and mercy organizations have made a great impact on American culture. Their loyalty to America has not gone unnoticed. For example, their response to World War II resulted in approximately fifty percent of their young men joining the U.S. military. This occurred despite the generally attractive provisions for conscientious objectors and the strong support from church leadership for this provision. Mennonites have also shed their image of not voting, and their lack of concern for U.S. politics. Many run for and hold public offices.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Timothy Grimsrud, “*The Significance of Civilian Public Service for Anabaptist Pacifism, in Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Island Press, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

The Mennonites of North America are refugees who have evolved into an acculturated multi-cultural group. Through history they have successfully weaved their past persecutions into a stepping stone for greater significance in their adopted countries. Their willingness to change and embrace Christian and American values has endeared them to Americans. Some of their values have changed. As they continue to change it is their fluidity that will propel them for years to come.

Much of their success is credited to the acceptance and security they experience in North America. These refugees embraced their new identity in Christ, were accepted in their new homeland and accelerated their spiritual, social and economic progress. Such is the story of the Mennonites in North America.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter is a discussion of the research methodology employed by the researcher to meet the project goals. The chapter describes the research design, the methods of measurements and the instruments designed to measure effectiveness. It establishes a research methodology for the treatment and evaluation of the program designed for refugees at Apostolic Church.

#### **Hypothesis**

The researcher proposes that the use of (1) Bible studies, (2) scripture readings, (3) affirmations, (4) meditations, (5) prayer, and (6) worship will result in observable improvement on the self-esteem of refugee participants. It is hoped and believed that participants will begin to perceive God as their healer and deliverer. This understanding of the universality of God's love and ongoing concern for them will heal and restore them. This restoration will result in positive behavior and attitudes which will improve their self-esteem.

### **Problems**

Many refugees have faced daunting emotional and psychological challenges that impact on their feelings of self-worth. The refugee members at the context church are victims of woundedness which stems from past traumas. This pattern has resulted in high levels of alcoholism, spousal abuse, crime, behavioral problems and dysfunctions. It has been observed that generally, this group of refugees is not making adequate efforts to assimilate into the larger community within or outside of the church. While some churches create feeding and clothing programs to help strangers in their midst, most pastors are not helping refugee members deal with issues of low self-esteem and psychological damage stemming from past traumas. The oppression of the mind continues for the refugees within our church communities, despite the fact that the Word of God offers guidelines and framework for handling such issues.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of scriptures, prayer, affirmations and worship as a way to improve the self-image of refugees in the church. Through observations and interactions within the church, the researcher has noted that generally, refugee members have feelings of inadequacy, failure, low self-esteem and poor self-image. These problems have resulted in their having defeatist attitudes, that lead to failure in the larger society. It has also been observed that the problem of low self-esteem is more prevalent within the refugee members than with other migrant groups in the church. It is evident that this problem is making it difficult for the refugee members to

interact with other groups within the church. There is also an apparent lack of effort to integrate into the broader American society.

The research design shall be implemented to meet the project goals. The researcher will engage the use of the phenomenological qualitative research design to study this dilemma. The group studied in this context is the refugee members of The Apostolic Church in Phoenix, Arizona. The church membership is eighty percent of refugees from different parts of the world. The remaining twenty percent are made up of other migrant groups, and United States citizens.

### **Framework**

The methodology that will be employed in this study is exploratory, qualitative research design. The predominant research process to be used is phenomenology which utilizes interviews, documentation and observations for data collection.<sup>1</sup> Qualitative research design suits this study because the researcher wishes to identify changes in attitudes, perceptions and subjective influences. Interviewing and observing the participants is the best data collection method for this type of research.

Measurement tools include pre and post-tests, interviews, journals and questionnaires. Pre-study baseline tests shall include surveys, journals and questionnaires to evaluate the current state of mind for each participant. It will further be used to assess the effectiveness of the treatment method.

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<sup>1</sup> John Creswell, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003).

Post tests and evaluations will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of Bible studies, affirmations, scripture readings and prayers on the self-esteem of the refugee participants. Questionnaires shall be administered at the end of the project to assess the participants understanding of the effect of Bible studies, prayer, worship and scriptural affirmations on their self-worth. Data collected at the end of the six week session shall be evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the various treatment methods and to identify areas of weakness for future implementations.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Intervention**

The researcher purposes an intervention by exploring the use of biblical studies, affirmations, meditations, prayer and worship on improving the self-esteem of refugee members. Six weeks of bible study, prayer, worship, meditations and affirmations sessions will be dispensed to the group. The researcher hopes to explore biblical passages that establish the love that God has for the strangers or “*gers*.” The Old Testament, perspectives will be imparted to participants demonstrating how God showed compassion for his people, the wandering Arameans. The study will further underscore God’s position with reference to the treatment of strangers and His instructions that strangers are to be well received and accommodated within the community. From the New Testament, the activities and teachings of Jesus shall be examined to lend critical reflection on the overall vision of Christ. Jesus came to save those who are downtrodden,

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<sup>2</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, 23.

rejected and persecuted. He desires to heal the brokenhearted. His love is extended to all God's children especially the marginalized.

The researcher shall use affirmations, reflections and declarations to buttress the fact that God indeed loves the stranger. Passages culled from the scripture, which gives affirmations on the true worth of a believer shall be recited daily and memorized. With these scriptures and reflections, the researcher hopes that the participants shall be impressed about the overwhelming love God has for strangers. Finally, worship, prayer and communion shall be conducted as part of the healing process.

Participants will meet twice a week, Saturdays and Wednesdays at the church premises for discussion, worship, prayer and the study of the Word of God. Participants shall be given daily affirmations from the scriptures to recite at home and shall be encouraged to write and discuss any changes during the course of the sessions. At the beginning of each session, affirmations shall be recited, followed by prayer and bible study. Discussions shall follow to determine the impact of the previous studies. At the end of each session, there will be worship and praise followed by individual and pastoral prayer. Participants shall be reminded to recite their daily affirmations in the morning and before bed each day. Refugees and Context Associates will be encouraged to keep a journal which shall be collected at the end of the six week period.

Context Associates assisted the researcher with interviews and follow up visits to the homes of the refugees. A visit before and after the six weeks program will be conducted to assess the impact of the interventions. Observations by Context Associate and the researcher will be promptly recorded in journals.



## Research Questions

The research questions being addressed are:

- Is the refugee important in the plan of God?
- What is the attitude of God towards the stranger?
- Is there hope for the refugee in a new land?
- Is the refugee a second class citizen in a new land?
- How does a refugee preserve his//her sense of self-worth in a new land?
- What is the responsibility of the church in helping these strangers achieve and maintain their sense of self-worth?
- What does the bible say about the status of strangers in our church communities?
- What effects, if any, does the reading and studying of passages about the love of God for strangers have on refugees?
- What effect if any, does meditations, affirmations, prayers and worship have on the self-esteem of refugees?
- How does being involved in church activities help the refugee overcome the emotional and psychological challenges that they face?

## **Target Group and Sample Group**

### *Target Group: Newer Refugees*

The target group is comprised of refugees who have lived in the United States for over two years. The researcher assumes that these families have overcome the initial challenges of coming into a new society and are emotionally and socially settled at this stage of their residency. By using this target group, instead of the newest arrivals, the researcher hopes to eliminate the possibility that their feelings of low self-esteem stem from the initial disorientation of being in a new environment. The participants consist of fifteen adults from different nations of the world. Since adolescents often experience shifts in religion and spirituality, the researcher has chosen to interview mature adults. The ages of participants range from twenty-five to fifty years of age. Participants are members of the context church. The Context Associates helped identify the target fifteen families that participated in the study.

### *Sample Group: Established Refugees*

The sample group represents more established refugees who have lived here for over ten years. The group was chosen to explore the issues pertaining to refugee spirituality and their use of spiritual exercises, especially during their early arrival to the United States. They are refugees who are successful in their careers and professional lives. One is a community leader while another is a high school teacher. One has earned a

Ph.D. and two are nurses. These individuals were chosen because of their success and influence within the refugee community.

The sample group range in age from twenty-six to fifty years of age. Unlike the focus or target group, they are not members of the context church. The group will provide increased understanding and clarity to issues that were previously identified. This sample group of established refugees shall help in the validation of the research results, the hypothesis and will ensure greater accuracy in the research process.<sup>3</sup>

### **Data Approach**

The qualitative research method by nature uses a variety of methods that are interactive in design and structure. The researcher shall employ the use of observations, interviews, journaling and questionnaires to collect data. The involvement of the participants is crucial to the success of the study. The researcher shall ensure that she builds rapport and credibility with the intended participants. This will help create willingness on the part of the participants to share private and sensitive information that may be impeding their positive self-esteem.

As trust is built and participants are willing to divulge sensitive facts about themselves, the researcher will utilize open ended questions, observations and field notes to further develop the model. The researcher will compare observations, and field notes with the Context Associates who are part of her research design team.

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<sup>3</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*.

Qualitative Research method is emergent in nature and that means that new issues may occur or evolve from the research implementation.<sup>4</sup> In that case the design team shall reassess its approach and design.

### **Data Collection: Planning and Management**

The data collection team consists of the researcher and three Context Associates. The team will use observations, interviews, journaling and questionnaires to collect data from participants.

The use of multiple data sources is indispensable in validating the research methodology. John Creswell's book on research extols the virtues of triangulation among different sources of data to enhance accuracy of a study.<sup>5</sup> Creswell explains the idea of data validation by stating that triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different sources. Researchers feel more confident that they may be moving towards accuracy and credibility if they utilize a variety of sources of information during the processes of data collection. In this project, triangulation is achieved with the use of the following data elements: Interviews, Questionnaires, Personal Journals, Observations, and Evaluations by the Research Team.

Prior to the first interviews, a test or sample group will be established. This group consists of older and more established refugee families, the Established Refugees. The purpose of the group is to explore issues, opinions, understandings and feelings about the

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<sup>4</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

research issues.<sup>6</sup> The use of this group shall provide in-depth qualitative information on the beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of the refugees participating, our target population.

The process of data analysis shall involve assessment of oral responses to the interview questions, the observed behaviors of the participants and the field notes of the researcher and Context Associates. As the research progresses, themes and questions may be redefined and coded.<sup>7</sup> The pre and post test questions shall be compared for variance in attitudes, perceptions and thoughts. A comparison shall also be made with information gathered from interviews, journals and observations during the field visits. The final step in the data management process is to interpret the data. Should any new questions arise; the team will attempt to interpret it in light of the research already conducted. New questions form the foundations for future research, action and change.<sup>8</sup>

### **Ethical Considerations**

In interviewing the refugee participants, the issues of social and emotional dependency are to be properly considered. As a result of past psychological abuses, refugees are often wary of discussions regarding their past histories. Their hesitancy can be fully understood when one considers the past abuses these individuals have been exposed to. The researcher expects resistance and hesitancy in obtaining data.

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<sup>6</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The researcher shall ensure that there is transparency and professional distance in the interviewing process. One form of transparency to be utilized is informed consent. The researcher is dealing predominantly with East African refugees who speak the common language of Swahili. The context church has two Swahili interpreters who will aid in the process of interpretation. In addition, permission to audio tape the participants will be requested. Each step of the process will be clearly explained to the participants.

Confidentiality shall be strictly applied. Given the political sensibilities and vulnerabilities only the participant's first name will be maintained in the research. Were required, first and last names shall be changed entirely to protect the identity of the participants.

The personal nature of the research may produce significant distress for the participants. The researcher is prepared to use her professional training as a pastor to ensure that the interview process runs smoothly.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

This chapter discusses the details of the implementation of the project model in the context setting. It reviews the impact on the participants and the results and outcome of the project study.

Many refugees have faced daunting emotional and psychological challenges that impact on their feelings of self-worth. The refugee members at the context church are victims of “*woundedness*” which stems from years of bearing the pains of past traumas. This pattern has resulted in high levels of alcoholism, spousal abuse, crime, behavioral problems and dysfunctions. It has been observed that generally, this group of refugees is not making adequate efforts to assimilate into the larger community within or outside the church and seem to have a negative image of self.

While some churches create feeding and clothing programs to help strangers in their midst, most churches are not helping refugee members deal with issues of low self-esteem and the psychological damages stemming from past traumas. The oppression of the mind continues for the refugees within our church communities, despite the fact that the Word of God offers guidelines and framework for handling these issues.

The goal of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of scriptures, prayer, affirmations and worship as a way to improve the self-image of refugees in the context church. It has also been observed that the problem of low self-esteem is more pervasive within the refugee members than with other migrant groups in the church. It is evident that this problem causes difficulties for the refugee members in their attempts to interact with other groups within the church.

Measures identified shall seek to evaluate the impact of the study based on the improvement of the respondent's self-esteem, the extent to which they determine to socialize with other members of the church, and the extent to which their responses reflect assertive, proactive attitudes rather than passivity towards their personal and future goals in the United States.

### **The Study Group**

The targeted participants are the refugee members in the context church. A notice was placed in the church bulletin about the upcoming project. Refugee members were invited to participate in the Bible study program. Fifteen members registered for the program. Their ages ranged from twenty-one to fifty years of age. There are fifty-five percent females and forty-five percent males. Thirty percent of the participants completed high school, sixty percent are yet to complete high school, and ten percent have completed college. The participants are refugee members who have resided in the United States for at least two years. The researcher assumed that this group of refugees have overcome the initial challenges of coming into a new society and should be settled at this



stage of their residency. By using this target group instead of newer arrivals, the researcher hopes to reduce the likelihood that their feelings of low self-esteem are related to the challenges of being in a new environment. (See Appendix H)

Prior to the initiation of the study a test or sample group was established. This focus group consisted of older and more established refugees. The researcher used this group to explore opinions and interventions regarding the research problems. The use of this group provided in-depth qualitative information on the beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of the refugee participant who represent the target population.

### **Data Collection**

The research approach was centered on a six week Bible study, a focus group session and an evaluation meeting for self-esteem. Questionnaires and surveys were designed to demonstrate the level of self-esteem and to evaluate the impact of the spiritual exercises on the individual participants. The researcher's intent was to analyze the data collected in order to evaluate the extent to which participants' self-esteem were improved. This will be demonstrated in their ability to become more cohesive and empowered to reach their goals.

### **Pre and Post Test Survey Registration**

After weeks of announcements, interested participants were registered for the program. The registration form inquired as to the registrant's history and background. See

Appendix C. Everyone was advised as to the confidentiality of the program and encouraged to participate. In addition to the registration form the research team administered the Pre-Test Survey. (Appendix C) The objective of the survey was to ascertain the refugee's understanding of who they were; how they perceived of their place in God's plan; how to anticipate their feelings of attachment to the United States and the roles they expect the church to play in their resettlement efforts. The Pre-Test Survey inquired as to the effects that prayers, Bible Studies and meditation have played in their emotional and spiritual development. These same questions were also administered as Post-Test Surveys.

There were ten responses to the Pre-Test Survey. Eighty percent of these participants have been in the context churches for at least two years. The responses to the Pre-Test Survey indicate that the participants, overwhelmingly, did not have an expectation for themselves which included a positive future in the United States. Seventy percent reported that they were not aware of God's plan in their lives or their futures. Thirty percent indicated that although they were saved from death or calamities, it was only so their lives could be preserved. They had no future plans for their lives and were unaware of God's plan for them. Eighty percent of the participants felt that God was indifferent to their welfares in the United States; while twenty percent indicated that God is involved in their lives. In general, the younger participants were more hopeful than the older participants when talking about their futures. Ninety percent of participants identified themselves as second class citizens; although they did not consider their children, born in this country as second class citizen. Eighty percent of the participants were not aware of the concept of self-esteem and the way it relates to human behavior or

resettlement efforts in the United States. When the concept was explained to them, ninety percent felt that self-esteem was not connected to their future happiness. The researcher believes that this is a cultural blind spot. It is not a concept discussed in their particular culture and so participants will need to become more familiar with the concepts of self-esteem. The researcher anticipates that as the study continued, more reflection, understanding, and wisdom will be absorbed by participants.

One hundred percent of participants did not know that the Bible talks about strangers and is welcoming of strangers. As far as meditations, prayers and bible study; a hundred percent indicated that these spiritual exercises have been helpful in the past in resolving issues of conflicts, although they do not see what effect they could have on them now. When asked about how the church can be more helpful in addressing any psychological or emotional challenges that newcomers face, seventy percent report that they did not have any such challenges. Thirty percent acknowledge having challenges with the English language. They see this as the primary reason they do not mingle with others. The researcher and her team noted this response as one possible cause for negative self-esteem.

### **Rosenberger Self Esteem Test**

The researcher and Context Associates administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Test to estimate the self-esteem levels of the participants. (See Appendix D) There were fifteen people who participated in this test. The test consists of fifty questions designed to elicit information on self-image. The test was administered before and after the Bible

study program in order to evaluate any changes or modification in the participants behaviors.

The overall scores indicate a high percentage of participants scored very low in the Self-Esteem Assessment Test. Seventy-one percent scored severely low self-esteem; eighteen percent scored moderately low self-esteem, ten percent scored mild low self-esteem while only one percent scored in the fairly good self-esteem. The research team coded the responses to certain questions considered significant such as:

#### *Feelings of Depression and Anxiety*

*Question 6:* I have periods in which I feel devastated and/or depressed. 88% marked yes; 12% marked no.

*Question 7:* I have difficulty knowing whom to trust and when to trust. 91% marked yes; while 19% marked no.

*Question 31:* I frequently think negative thoughts about myself and others. 90% marked yes; while 10% marked no.

*Question 47:* I get anxious or upset that I experience most of the following: heart racing or pounding, sweating, fearfulness, blushing, difficulty swallowing or lump in my throat, shaking, poor concentration, dizziness, nausea or diarrhea, butterflies. 100% of participants marked yes.

*Question 50:* I have suffered violence and traumas in the past. 100% of the participants marked yes.

#### *Feelings of Helplessness and Loss of Control*

*Question 29:* I often feel like I don't know what is expected of me. 83% marked yes while 17% marked no.

Question 41: I am not very aware of my feelings. 72% marked yes while 18% marked no

Question 49: I rely on the opinions of others to make decisions. Eighty percent marked yes while 20% marked no.

*Question 13:* I think others are very focused on and critical of what I say and do. 65% marked yes, while 35% marked no.

### *Feelings of Inadequacy*

*Question 10:* I often feel like I don't know the right thing to do or say. 72% marked yes, while 28% marked no.

*Question 38:* I am fearful that I will say or do something that will make me look stupid or incompetent. 86% marked yes, while 14% marked no.

The overall conclusion from the Rosenberger Self-Esteem Analysis is that the participants were experiencing high levels of depression, anxiety and a generalized loss of self-image. The researcher anticipated that participation in the Bible study program and spiritual exercises would improve the way the participants viewed themselves. She also expected to see a shift from the passive responses relevant to how they view their future roles in the United States to a more positive and proactive role.

### **Bible Study Course Design**

A six week program of Bible studies, prayer, worship, meditations and affirmations was dispensed to the group. (See Appendix B) Participants met twice a week, Saturdays and Wednesdays for discussions, worship, prayers, and Bible study. Altogether there were twelve sessions, two sessions per week. The regular church

programs were rescheduled to accommodate this program and to focus the church's attention on this important challenge. Members of the Church Board and Stewards were highly cooperative towards making the program successful. They all attended the sessions. The sessions were held at the church and an average of ten to fifteen participants attended each session. Participants were encouraged to attend each session in order to gain maximum benefit. Each session lasted for at least one hour.

On the first day of the program, participants were given daily affirmations to recite in the morning and at nighttime. Participants were provided with note pads and encouraged to write and discuss any reflections or questions during the meetings. They were also asked to write about the weekly Points of Reflections. Points of Reflections are concepts derived from the Bible Study. They were tailored to focus the participants' minds on the topics of discussion and they challenged participants to respond to the issues raised in the discussion. The researcher hoped that from the participant's responses she would be able to gauge their reflections and opinions, and see if there any modifications in their thought process. The Points of Reflections also served as a homework assignment.

At the beginning of each session, affirmations from the previous session were recited, followed by prayers and Bible study. Discussions focused on each day's theme and the Point of Reflections. Towards the end of the session, there was worship and praise followed by individual and pastoral prayers. Participants were reminded to recite their daily affirmations in the morning and before bed time each day.

Materials for the Bible Study were derived from various Christian articles written on improving self-esteem and especially for those who have experienced past traumas.

The researcher developed the program material and all survey instruments, questionnaire and assignments. The program consisted of discussions, affirmations, Points of reflections, meditation scriptures and Bible study texts. (See the entire course outline in Appendix I)

The discussion themes which were incorporated as the Points of Reflections were presented in the following question format: Who Am I? Does God love me? Does God have a plan for me? Does God have a plan for me in the United States? Why have I suffered so much? What is my new identity in Christ Jesus? Does God care for the “stranger” How can I forgive my persecutors? How can I forgive and accept myself? How does God see me? These questions reflect the state of mind of those who have experienced traumatic situations and who are struggling to find meaning in their new environments. They were gleaned from the recommendations of Established refugees and their response to the questionnaires. (Appendix E). As can be gleaned from the responses to the refugees’ views of the world have become skewed, seen through the prism of their sufferings and pain. Unfortunately these deep thoughts have persisted beyond their previous hostile environments to the United States, resulting in mental and psychological disorders.

The Meditations were created from the lessons learned in each Bible Study. They are conclusions from the Bible study that reflect Biblical truths on the subjects taught. They were supported with scripture references and the participants were encouraged to study the scripture references in their private Bible Study.

*Examples of Meditations are:*

- I am made in the image of God. (Gen.1:27)
- Nothing can separate me from the love of God. (Rom.8:38-39)
- I am God's workmanship, created for His good works. (Eph.2:10)
- God will fulfill His purpose for me. (Ps.57:2)

Affirmations are assertions designed to be recited every morning and evening.

They were designed translated into Swahili, and written on cards. They are powerful recitations that remind one of God's goodness, love and compassion for the downtrodden. They are designed to encourage, uplift and exhort one to be strengthened in the knowledge of God's powerful love.

*Examples of Affirmations are:*

- I am wonderfully and skillfully made. (Ps.139:13-14)  
*Swahili:* Mimi ni ajabu na ustadi alifanya. (Zaburi 139:13-14)
- God loves me so much that He died for me. (John 3:16)  
*Swahili:* Mungu ananipenda sana kwamba alikufa kwa ajili yangu. (Yohana 3:16)
- God has plans for a future and a hope for me. (Jer.29:11)  
*Swahili:* Mungu ana mipango kwa ajili ya baadaye na matumaini kwa ajili yangu. (Yeremia 29:11)
- I am destined for greater things. (Hag.2:9).  
*Swahili:* Mimi zinazopelekwa kwa ajili ya mambo makubwa. (Hag.2:9).



## Week One

### Table 1 Program

The first week of the program included a brief introduction to the programmatic goals. The researcher talked about her quest to become a doctorate holder in Ministries and gave a brief history of her journey as an immigrant into the United States. She, like the participants, is an immigrant and had to overcome many challenges in the United States. The researcher reminded the participants that it was not necessary to divulge personal or sensitive stories in order to take part in the program. All discussions, journals and submissions were confidential and protected.

The themes for the first week were centered on the Reflections: *Who Am I?* And, *Does God care for me?* Ten people were in attendance. The initial session was a sharing event with an introduction to the Biblical foundation of Gal.3:26 “*For ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*” The presenter talked about the importance of seeing one-self as God sees us and the consequences of having a negative self-image. Further, the presenter addressed the issue of man’s creation in Gen.1:27 “*And God made man in His Image*” She delved into the different interpretations of the passage, pulling out biblical references about the image of God to establish man’s unique position in the hierarchy of creation. These passages were studied in the context of a healthy Biblical self-image. At the end of the Bible study, the presenter asked the following questions, while the Context Associates translated and noted the following responses:

#### Sunday Session

#### 1. How does the knowledge of how God sees me influence my self-image?

- Some participants had not heard that they were created in God’s image and therefore were unable to articulate what it means to them.

- Some participants acknowledged that they were God's children but admitted that they did not know that they were created in His image and shared certain attributes in common with God.
- To the vast majority of the participants, God was far above the human level and could not possibly share any attributes with them.

### Wednesday Session

#### 2. How does the knowledge of God's love influence my self-image?

- Most participants had either not thought about the concept of God's love or where not able to articulate what it means to them.
- A few stated that it is a great and wonderful feeling to know that God places a high value on man and loves man uniquely.
- Some participants questioned the love of God amid so much suffering in the world.
- Some talked about the injustices in the world and could not rationalize God's love in the face of persecutions, murders and violence.

The responses in this week's sessions revealed that most of the participants did not understand the concept of being made in God's image and how it related to their self-image. Most of the participants acknowledged that the love of God is difficult to grasp in the context of pain and suffering. The discussions were interspersed by questions which were left unanswered. This is because the presenter planned to incorporate these questions into future Bible studies.

## Week Two

### Table 2 Program

In the second week of the program, the discussions were centered on God's plan for each individual and His plans for bringing the individual to the United States. The presenter used the teaching to expound on the believer's part in God's eternal purpose for mankind. The believer has been chosen from the foundation of the earth and for a purpose. The believer is God's own workmanship made for His good purpose. The foundational scripture is Jer.29:1. *For I know the plans that I have for you, to give you a future and a hope. To bring you to an expected end.* The story of Joseph was used as an example of God's sovereignty and work in the life of His children. At the end of the bible study, the presenter asked the following question, while the Context Associates translated and noted the following responses:

#### Sunday Session

1. How does knowing that God has a plan for me change my self-image?

- Made me feel special and valued. (24%)
- Encouraged me to know God's will for my life. (26%)
- Gave me hope and desire to fulfill God's will for me. (27%)
- Did not affect me either way. (23%)

#### Wednesday Session

2. How does knowing that God has a plan for me in the United States change my self-image?

- Made me feel special and loved. (24%)
- Made me feel worthy and valuable. (36%)
- Encouraged me to want to accomplish great things. (33%)
- Did not affect me either way. (17%)

The responses from this week's sessions indicated that the participants were beginning to make a connection between God's plans for their lives and their self-image. Some were excited to know that God had specific and individual plans for their lives. Some questions centered on the many limitations and challenge that immigrant's face in the country. One person wondered if a person who did not speak the language could dream of making a good life. Maybe success was only limited to people born in the United States? The presenter offered many examples of successful immigrants, some who did not speak the English language upon entry into the United States. She also pointed to God's ability to help anyone who desired to overcome their challenges.

### **Week Three** **Table 3 Program**

In week three, the presenter discussed the delicate subject of pain and suffering. The presenter pointed out that some sufferings did not originate from God. Although God allowed them, sufferings are a result of man's fallen state. However, God works through sufferings to refine and mature us and also works to bring us out of them. The foundational scripture is James 1:2 "*Beloved, Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.*" The discussions that followed were lively and emotional. The presenter could sense that the topic made a great impact on the participants and she allowed more time for discussion. Some offered stories of persecutions while some were notably quiet. The presenter sought to encourage questions, reassuring the participants that no question is unimportant. One person stated that she did not want to offend God by her comments but that she had a lot of unresolved questions. The presenter encouraged her to ask

questions. She pointed to Job's questions in the Bible and told her that it is human to question God's actions. As the discussion ensued, answers were provided and reassurances were provided from the Word of God. Nearing close to end of the session, the presenter sought to curtail further questions in order to accommodate the time schedule.

At the end of the Bible study, the presenter asked the following question, while the Context Associates translated and noted the following responses:

#### Sunday Session

1. How does knowing that my sufferings did not originate from God influence my perception of God and self?
  - Knowing that God is not the architect of my suffering is quite liberating. (30%)
  - I have often blamed God for my suffering, but I am rethinking my decision. (32%)
  - I have indeed grown and matured through my sufferings. (8%)
  - I am still unconvinced and I blame God for my past sufferings. (10%)

#### Wednesday Session:

2. How does knowing my identity in Christ influence my self-image?
  - Knowing that I am a member of Christ' body makes me feel loved and valued. (32%)
  - Knowing that I have the mind of Christ and can love people is encouraging. (21%)
  - Knowing that I can do all things through Christ is empowering. (39%)
  - Knowing my new identity in Christ makes no difference to myself image. (9%)

The week's responses indicated that some of the participants still harbored resentments against God for past sufferings. One participant who lost her sister in the civil war in Congo stated that she was still struggling with reconciling God's love and her suffering. Most of the participants received personal prayers and ministrations.

Participants were encouraged to continue with their weekly meditations and daily affirmations.

#### **Week Four Table 4 Program**

The presenter concentrated on the topic of ‘Strangers’ in the Old Testament. She examined the lives of notable strangers such as Abraham, Ruth, Joseph, Jacob and Joseph. She talked about the lives of the Israelites as they moved from place to another, emphasizing God’s faithfulness in their journeys through the desert. She also spoke of successful immigrants who have accomplished great things in the country. The foundational scripture for this week’s teaching is Exod.23: 9 where God noted that He understood the heart of the strangers and warned the Israelites not to mistreat them. The Wednesday session was graced by visits from two established refugees in Arizona, who gave a recital of their struggles and successes. There were lively conversations on the topic and the presenter closed the session by asking for those who want to accomplish great things in the USA to stand up. Everybody stood up for prayers!

At the end of the bible study, the presenter asked the following questions, while the Context Associates translated and noted the following responses:

#### **Sunday Session**

1. How does knowing that God cared for the strangers in the Bible affect my self-image?
  - It brings great encouragement to know that God’s people were once strangers in a foreign land, just like I am. (34%)
  - To know that God cares for the heart of the strangers is empowering. (37%)
  - It helps me know that God is interested in my welfare in this country. (27%)
  - It does not affect my self-image. (2%)

### Wednesday Session

#### 2. Which Old Testament stranger do you most relate to. Why?

- I do relate to Abraham who by Faith gained his blessings. (32%)
- I do relate to Joseph who persevered in spite of many trials. (34%)
- I do relate to Ruth who believed God of Israel and was blessed. (32%)
- I do not relate to any of the Old Testament strangers. (2%)

### Week Five Table 5 Program

In week 5, the presenter talked about the New Testament perspective of strangers. Jesus broke all racial and societal barriers towards strangers and created an inclusive ministry that was particularly hospitable towards the disenfranchised of the society. The foundational scripture was Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus gave as His mission statement. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for He has anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”* Just like in the Old Testament where God looked out for the strangers’ interest, Jesus also came looking for the distressed and disenfranchised of society. Paul, in the New Testament, stated that all believers are strangers on earth. Therefore believers must not resent being different or unique in the society. The presenter gave examples of New Testament strangers such as Jairus, the Roman Centurions, The Samaritan woman, Cornelius, the Good Samaritan. Again, two established refugees visited the program and gave their stories of survival in the United States.

At the end of the bible study, the presenter asked the following questions, while the Context Associates translated and noted the following responses:

#### Sunday Session

1. How does knowing that Jesus loved and accepted strangers affect your self-image?
  - I feel highly motivated by the knowledge that Jesus loved and accepted strangers in His ministry. (40%)
  - I feel like my life is worth living for Him. (31%)
  - With Jesus is on my side, I can do all things. (28%)
  - It does not affect my self-image. (1%)

#### Wednesday Session

2. Which New Testament stranger do you most relate with and why?
  - The Samaritan woman, she perceived who Jesus was and reached her community for Jesus. (52%)
  - Cornelius, he invested in his community and God saved his whole family. (27%)
  - The Good Samaritan, he had love towards every one and helped the wounded man. (20%)
  - I do not relate to any of the New Testament strangers. (1%)

### **Week Six Table 6 Program**

This week, another delicate topic was discussed-forgiveness. The presenter taught on the value of forgiveness and how it helps the person who is hurt to release everyone who has hurt them. She played a video on the story of Corry Ten Boon, a holocaust survivor, and her incredible story of survival and forgiveness. She stated that when a person is forgiving towards those who had hurt her in the past, the person becomes more like God. God in turn forgives that person and brings peace and



restoration. The foundational scripture was Matt.6:14-15. Some of the participants told stories of past hurts, others confessed that they are struggling with forgiving past offenses. The instructor gently affirmed their hurts but taught that forgiveness is a priority on the road to recovery. Participants were asked to pray to God to give them the grace and power to forgive, because sometimes it is very difficult to give forgiveness. Everybody stood up to pray. These were very emotional sessions where participants wept and asked for God strength to forgive. Further, the presenter asked the participants to write the names of those who had hurt them in the past and many prayed over these names, releasing them from any blame. Participants were also asked to forgive themselves, a very important element in their recovery process. There was a feeling that these sessions were the climax of the whole program. The Holy Spirit released many from their burdens.

At the end of the bible study, the presenter asked the following questions, while the Context Associates translated and noted the following responses:

#### Sunday Session

1. How does forgiving others affect my perception of God and self-image?
  - When I forgive others, I have faith that God will wrong every wrong against me. (25%)
  - When I forgive others I am empowered to be more like Jesus. (46%)
  - I feel a sense of peace and comfort because I know that I am obeying God. (29%)
  - Forgiveness towards others does not affect my self-image. (0)%

#### Wednesday Session

2. How does forgiving myself affect my self-image?
  - When I forgive myself, I am free to love myself and others. (45%)
  - When I forgive myself, I become less critical and accepting of my faults. (34%)
  - When I forgive myself, I let in the peace and love of God into my life. (21%)

- Forgiving myself does not affect my self-image. (0%)

The comments provided demonstrate that the participants have been greatly imparted by the teachings from the Word of God. The research team could observe noticeable changes in the countenance and behaviors of the participants. People received healings from past hurts and participants were beginning to see themselves the way God sees them. One participant confessed that he thought that he had come to the United States to wait for his death but that he is now contemplating on taking college classes. This participant is the oldest in the class. Many comments were received about the program and they were classified below:

- A majority of the participants expressed a deep sense of relief and comfort from the teachings they received;
- Many who had not identified the real reasons behind their depression and inner turmoil had greater clarity;
- Some felt that the session on forgiveness made the greatest impact on them;
- A majority acknowledged that they had never heard about the concept of strangers in the Bible and the teachings helped them grow towards accepting themselves and others;
- Some participants felt that the presence of the established refugees helped them to acknowledge their strengths as refugees, something they were previously unaware.

In the final session, the researcher administered the Rosenberger Self-esteem Test, and the Final evaluation. She collected the participant's journals for further case evaluations and again reassured all participants that the journals will be held in strict confidentiality. At the end of the session, the participants and the Church Board members who were in attendance expressed heartfelt appreciation of the Program.

### Final Program Evaluation

1. How has the program changed your self-image?
  - I see myself as a valued member of God's kingdom. (53%)
  - I believe I can accomplish great things in life. (47%)
  - My self-image remains the same. (0%)
  
2. How has the program changed your perception about God?
  - I believe that God loves me and has great plans for me. (52%)
  - I believe that God loves me uniquely and personally. (48%)
  - I do not believe that God cares or loves me. (0%)
  
3. How has the program helped you in accepting yourself and others?
  - I love and accept myself more. (58%)
  - I am more accepting of others and myself. (42%)
  - I have not been affected either way. (0%)
  
4. How has the program changed your level of understanding of the connection between self-image and success in life?
  - Increased my level of understanding. (98%)
  - Decreased my level of understanding. (0%)
  - No change in my level of understanding. (2%)

Rate which aspect of the program made the greatest impact on you

- Bible Study. (52%)
- Prayers and Worship. (28%)
- Mediations. (11%)
- Affirmations. (9%)

See Final Program Evaluations (Attachment P)

### **Research Team Conclusions**

The research team met: (1) to discuss various components of the program, (2) to address the results of the surveys; (3) to analyze the data. The researcher hoped to present their conclusions to the Church body. The meetings were facilitated by the researcher and lasted one hour.

### **Program Activities**

At the first meeting, the research team met and assessed the strength and weaknesses of the various components of the program in order to ascertain which aspect had the greatest impact. Their assessments were based on the journal entries, questionnaires, evaluations and observations. The team concluded that the Bible study made the greatest impact towards the success of the program. That the refugees were unfamiliar with most of the concepts taught was pointed out as being significant to the program. These refugees were taught that they held a special place in God's heart. Further, the presentation on forgiveness was highly rated because of its spiritual impact.

More significantly, the participants were made aware of the impact their self-image had on their success in the USA. Many were not aware of the concept of self-image prior this program. A great majority had not made the connection between self-image and their resettlement efforts. The team members were very impressed with the quality of the topics chosen and the presenter's style of teaching. She was amiable, genuine and possessed a sense of apathy towards the participants. She effectively controlled the tone of the discussions. Program Topics by order of importance

The topics that had the greatest impact were rated:

1. Who Am I?
2. Why have I suffered so much?
3. How can I forgive my persecutors?
4. How Can I forgive and accept myself?

The daily affirmations were also highly rated and deemed very effective. The team acknowledged the role that daily affirmations played in helping participants stay on course during the program. Prayers ranked third in order of effectiveness. The Prayers of forgiveness were most impactful. The presence of the Holy Spirit was greatly felt on the day this activity was held. Pastoral prayers were found to be quite helpful. Worship and praise ranked closely to prayers. (See Appendix K)

While the team acknowledged that the weekly meditations were created to help the participants focus on the program goals, they suspected that many were not reading their weekly meditations. The team felt that the participants could have been made to share their thoughts on the meditations, making them accountable for the readings. However, time was considered a limitation to this idea. The conclusions of the research matched the responses from the participants. (See Appendix L)

### **Bible Study Questionnaires**

The team compared the initial response to the questionnaires and the final questionnaires. The results demonstrated an empirical growth in the participants' self-image as they accepted God's love for strangers. The Bible study was significant in helping the participants make this shift. Eighty-eight percent of the participants indicated

a positive growth in the area of their self-image, eleven percent had a slight increase and less than one percent did not have any significant impact. (See Appendix M)

### **Journal Entries**

The initial journal entries were more detailed and contained personal stories and accounts from the participants. Since they were written in Swahili, they were translated before the meeting. Participants were asked not to write their names on the journals. The journals showed that at the beginning of the Program, people struggled with the concepts of self-image and God's love. In some entries, the participants noted the following:

“I sometimes feel like God brought me to America to die...”

“If I am loved by God, why is life so difficult for me...?”

“God does not love me, He only expects me to obey him...”

“I don't expect God to love me; I have led a bad life.... ”

“If God loves us, why did He create those who want to kill us...?”

“I cannot expect God to love me; I have done terrible things to others ...”

“I want to love God but He is so far above in heaven... does He really care?”

The journal entries were quite revealing. They detailed ethos of despair, hopelessness, and loss of hope. Though the refugee members have been part of the church for two years, they had not made the connection that God loves and cares for them. They seem to be having a form of religion that denied the power of God. 2 Timothy 3: 5. The later journal entries showed remarkable shifts in focus. The journals seem to be more forgiving of God, self, and others.

“O God, help me to believe that you love me.... ”

“Please God forgive me for blaming you for everything that happened to me...”

“I can do all things with the help of Jesus...”

“God teach me new skills and give me bright ideas for my future.... ”

### **Rosenberger Self-Esteem Tests**

The Rosenberger Tests also demonstrated a shift in self-image. Although this shift was not a radical one, it was noticeable. Many participants scored in the category of fairly good self-esteem, while the majority scored in the mild low self-esteem category. The greatest shift was from the severely low self-esteem category to the mild low self-esteem category. The researcher was impressed with the movement towards a healthier self-esteem. It showed that the participant’s perspective about themselves had changed, albeit slightly, during the course of the program. (See Appendix J)

### **Comparative Analysis of Responses**

The shift towards a more positive self-esteem can be gleaned from the Questionnaires, Rosenberger Tests, and the Journal entries. They provide a detailed picture of a change in perception and mood. The respondents were more assertive, and less intimidated. (See Appendix M)

Participants maintained an attendance average of ten to fifteen individuals per session with an increasingly higher participation as the program progressed. The

recommendation of the design team was forwarded to Church Directors. The Directors recommended that the findings be integrated into future ministry developments.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter is a reflection on the project, its successes and failure; its impact on the ministry to the refugees; and the researcher's recommendations for future models of ministry.

Though the attendance by this group of refugee members was well received, the researcher sensed discordance between the church programs and the refugees who constitute a majority of the context church membership. The church was offering physical reliefs such as clothing, food, transportation, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, but the church body sensed that something was missing. The group seemed to be following along with church activities, while lacking spiritual nourishment. The group seemed sad, depressed apathetic.

Recognizing the complexity of challenges that refugees bring with them into the United States, the church Board employed translators, drivers, and ESL teachers. The church engaged the services of Saint Mary's Food Bank and the Interdenominational Christian Ministry to provide food and clothing to the refugees. The Arizona Department of Economic Services engaged the services of the context church to provide spiritual nourishment and support as part of the refugee's resettlement efforts. Despite the availability of these programs and a myriad of efforts by the individual church members

to help the refugee member resettle, many refugees remained unemployed. Alcoholism, domestic violence and social dysfunctions were on the rise. Refugee members were also not mingling with other church members and only associated with people from their ethnic group. The church leadership agonized over how to make the church body more cohesive.

Upon further research, it was discovered that this group were also likely suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This state of mind prevented them from having healthy self-image and impacted on their spiritual and emotional development. The researcher, who is the Director of Refugee Services at the context church, engaged the church in addressing this rather unique problem. Calls to other churches did not provide any helpful solutions, although some churches acknowledged that some of their members may be having similar problems. Most churches have concentrated efforts on providing physical support to their refugee members.

Through prayers, research and the opportunity of being in the doctorate program at United Theological Seminary, the researcher created a program that will use the Word of God, prayers, meditations and affirmations to help refugees to recover from past traumas, while restoring a positive perception of self. The Word of God was chosen because the Scriptures confirm that it is a powerful tool, a two-edged sword that cuts the marrow and the spirit. Heb.4:12. The Word of God is a healing balm and has been the source of comfort to many souls. Jer.8:22. She chose to use prayers, meditations and affirmations because of their proven impact on helping people who have suffered from trauma. Alcoholic Anonymous and Eastern religions have used these spiritual mediums for helping people overcome past pains. The researcher anticipated that participation in

the program would help refugees readjust their perception of self, helping them more become productive members of the society.

The Bible study program examined the relationship between the Word of God, prayers, meditations, affirmations on the self-image of refugees. It is built on the assumption that refugees would benefit from a program targeted at lifting and encouraging their self-esteem. The specific measures used to assess the impact of the Program were based on the extent to which the participants changed their perception of self and were determined to become more proactive towards personal and spiritual goals. They were derived from the responses to the questionnaires, journals entries and the Rosenberger tests. The researcher also relied on the assessments and observations of the Context Associates during the course of the program.

An assumption built into this research is that the refugees past traumas were the cause of their low self-esteem. A history of the refugees gleaned from the questionnaires, registration forms, (Appendix E) indicates that all the participants in the program have experienced an average of three to five seriously traumatic events. In addition, all of the participants acknowledged going through bouts of depression and anxiety.

The research participants were carefully limited to refugees who have lived in the United States for over two years. This was because the researcher wanted to eliminate the possibility that their negative self-images stemmed from the experience of living in a far more sophisticated environment than the refugees were accustomed to. Within two years of entry, most refugees have overcome the challenges of language limitations and have adapted to their new homeland. These presumptions however may change from

group to group. This is because people who have strong structural and social supports usually adapted faster than those who do not.

The project started with a focus group, made up of Established refugees. (See Appendix E and F) These are refugees who have passed through similar ordeals as the participants. Their recommendations helped drive the nature and scope of the interventions. The focus group recommended and approved the use of prayers, the Word of God, meditations and affirmations as a means of intervention. The program emphasized the need to have a healthy self-image and noted that a healthy self-image can be found in the knowledge of God's love. Recovery from past hurts can be gained from the knowledge of God's love. The program talked about God's heart and faithfulness towards the strangers and His great plans for them in their new land. Prayers, meditations and affirmations were used to seal the impact of the living Word of God in the minds of the participants.

The research was a huge success. At the start of the program, the researcher anticipated that a one hour a week session was not sufficient to cover the program outline and materials. She knew that she faced language limitations, possible schedule conflicts with members that had to work and possible issues with translators. She also anticipated that the nature and scope of the research may have demanded more time for discussions. She then decided to have a twice a week meeting. The Sunday session will cover the main themes for the week, while the Wednesday session will allow participants more time for discussions on the week's reflections. Fortunately, the participants and the church board agreed to the schedule.

The decision to meet twice a week proved very helpful because in the earlier sessions, the participants were reluctant to participate or offer responses to questions. The Context Associates worked hard to write down responses which were sketchy and uninvolved. By the third meeting, the responses became more engaging and the researcher was happy that the meetings were scheduled twice a week. It would have been impossible to execute the program outline if held only once a week. There were times when the researcher felt that the pace of the program was too rigorous for the participants. As she reviewed the feedback and increasing interest in the topics, she felt more comfortable with the schedule. Since she concentrated on one single concept for each session, she was able to cover all the topics in the outline. It was in the area of discussions and feedback that she struggled for time. She had to carry over discussions from the previous week to accommodate time limitations.

To ensure proper communication with refugees, there must be good translators. The program had hired two translators who performed an excellent job. The researcher feared that some ideas might have been lost through translation. She experienced a couple of lost communications, but fortunately, someone in the audience aided in the translation. Since participants must totally absorb the contents of the program, the use of good translators cannot be overemphasized.

It is highly recommended that Pastors and seasoned ministers be involved in leading this type of intervention program. This is because a certain level of trust must be established and refugees traditionally have been abused by authority figures in the past. A seasoned Minister would be less likely to abuse power and would know when to use the power of prayers to bring comfort to the hurting refugee.

Prior to the research, participants expressed insecurities. Some stated that they did not want to share their personal stories in public. Some said that their persecutors are connected to members of another tribe who were also going to participate in the Research. A majority did not want to acknowledge that they suffered any emotional, mental or psychological distress. This may be due to the fact that people who suffer such illness are treated with disdain within their communities. They did not want to be alienated by family and friends. The researcher prayerfully reached out to her Context Associates who were members of the tribes of the refugees. She was advised that no person should be made to share any personal stories. All information must be voluntary and confidential. The two warring tribes were made to understand that any personal communications would be privately held by the Pastor.

As for the issue regarding psychological and emotional distress, the researcher admitted that she had not properly communicated the goals of the program to the members. She explained to the members that the program does not seek to label anyone as being psychological or emotionally sick since it does not have the tools to diagnose mental illness. However with the pain that most refugees have experienced, it is possible that these issues may exist. She was only assessing the level of self-image that the participants possessed. She related that no one would be tagged crazy by the Program. The researcher assured the participants that data gathered would be strictly used for research purpose and were confidential. The researcher believes that these issues may have contributed to the initial reluctance that she had in eliciting information from the participants. She was very careful about her choice of words and constantly reassured the

participants of the confidentiality of their discussions. It is obvious that the issue of trust and the knowledge of cultural sensibilities cannot be overlooked in this type of research.

Fortunately for the researcher, the topics being discussed were of interest to the participants. Since most of them had never thought of themselves as special to God, the teaching about God and strangers was particularly uplifting. For the first time, the participants could actually relate to Bible characters like Joseph, Ruth, Abraham, Jacob and Ruth. As the participants began to make the connections between a positive self-image and their personal growth, they became more interested in the subject matter.

The Bible Study materials proved to be especially helpful and the presenter was particularly skillful in her delivery. Everybody was made to participate in the Bible readings and all references were carefully translated and explained. As the participants pored over the Bible passages, they were asked to pause and reflect over what they had just read. The presenter then asked questions about the passages. The presenter also made sure to carefully answer each question raised by the participants. Often times there were digressions from the subject but she kept the discussions within the time limit. The daily affirmations and weekly meditations helped solidify the concepts and subjects that were taught.

There were other challenges that the researcher struggled to overcome. It was difficult to get the participants to journal their thoughts and reflections. Given their literacy challenges, participants encouraged to write in Swahili, however some of them did not write their thoughts down. The Context Associates had to pull information out of them. The Context Associates expressed frustrations with eliciting information from the

participants. It was apparent that refugees would rather forget about past painful experiences than recollect them.

In addition, Meditation exercises were not frequently followed up with. Some participants complained of either not having enough time or that they forgot to do them. The research team made a series of calls to encourage the participants to do their meditations and to stay on course. At times the scale of the program felt enormous and the researcher had to rescale the topics to accommodate time lines and to ensure that she was not piling too much information on the participants.

During the course of the program, some established refugees were invited to speak to the group. They helped explain certain concepts to the group. Particularly at the beginning of the program, they helped restate the research goals to the group and encouraged participation. This approach worked because after this event, the program experienced an increase in attendance and participation. The researcher would highly recommend the use of established refugees in future models of this project. The church or researcher who hopes to help refugees must also try to engage with the local NGO's and state agency in charge of the refugee members. Many social workers in charge of the refugee members were initially opposed to the program. The researcher was careful to state that the program was not a medical intervention. It was created to help the refugees' spiritual growth which in turn helped them in their self-image and resettlement efforts.

The researcher could not find support from other local churches. Most churches were either not aware of the existence of low self-image among its refugees members or did not have the facilities-translators, transportations, contacts with established refugee, that could help establish such a program. This researcher found this to be a sad state of



affairs. The church possesses the Word of God, a powerful instrument in transformation and yet is unwilling or unable to use it. The researcher admits that there are lots of challenges that come with helping this group but the significance of refugees healing from past emotional pains must not be buried under their physical needs. Some churches feel that refugees can access mental health services through the State. The reality is that most refugees are not taking advantage of these services because of the cultural norms already discussed in earlier chapters. This program offers an excellent, and maybe the only opportunity to heal from the past for refugees that attend our churches.

Though this model of ministry cannot take the place of medical intervention the research has established that spiritual support provides substantial healing for the emotional suffering of refugees. Future research must concentrate efforts on providing the right structure and environment for this type of ministry model. The researcher is not confident that the program provided all the necessary support and structure to help the participants. For example, could the program have been better delivered to a smaller or larger group? Could there have been more success if she had counseled individuals in her office? How about those refugees that have experienced severe traumas, can they benefit from such a program? The researcher does not know what the right responses are and hopes that future research will unravel the answers. The researcher is also concerned that the motivations gained from the program may be lost with time if considerable efforts are not made to sustain them. In addition, the impact of the program over time is yet to be established.

There is a huge vacuum in this area of research. Few research projects have examined the impact of spiritual activities on past traumas and self-esteem in refugees.

The researcher was burdened with having a lack of reference and a point of comparison for her project. This area is new and at its exploratory stages. Many more models will need to be established before definite conclusions are made about the benefits of the research.

The importance of this subject to the modern day church cannot be overemphasized. Refugees are coming to our churches and the church must be responsive to their needs. Jesus did not leave any group unattended in His ministry. However, before the churches can seriously reach out to refugees they have to resolve the larger debate about the place of immigrants in the society. The issue of illegal immigrants has tended to cloud the discussion on helping refugees. Most churches do not understand that these groups of immigrants are legal residents who are here because the United Nations has determined that living in their former environments could result in imminent death and or persecutions. They have been granted legal rights to work and reside in the United States.

To the participants in this program, the program was an exciting venture of discovering their position in Christ. That God has a special place for them was a welcome relief. These are people who have traditionally been told that they were either not accepted or welcome. The encouragement to see themselves as God sees them was well received. Participants enjoyed the personal prayers and the worship that followed them. Many asked for prayers to overcome personal challenges and for courage to face their futures in the United States. The prayers of forgiveness greatly benefitted the participants and helped them recover from years of repressed resentments. There were many emotional and spiritual releases and some participants spoke to each other for the first time during the program. There is no doubt that spending time in the Word of God, in

prayers, affirmations and meditations does greatly impact on a person's emotional and spiritual health. The program ministry to this particular group brought healing and greatly impacted on their self-image.

### **Replicability of this Model of Ministry**

In order to implement this model of ministry in a church or ministry setting, the following recommendations are significant:

1. *Specify the group of refugee's that is targeted for help.* Refugees who speak different languages cannot be helped as a group. It is better to divide the groups into relatable language groups to aid for better communication and comfort of the participants.
2. *Have your support staff of bilingual translators and staff ready.*  
Materials must be translated into the language of the targeted refugee group. If possible, provide transportation to ensure attendance to the meetings.
3. *Determine if a group or single person session better serves your purpose.* The researcher thinks that depending on the level of trauma, individual counseling may afford a better environment for recovery than larger groups.
4. *Engage the support of established refugees.* Most of them have been through the journeys of the refugee members and can understand their

experience. Ensure that the established refugees understand the language and the cultural sensibilities of your group.

5. *Learn about the cultures of the refugee populations that you are ministering to.* Make sure that you understand their cultural beliefs about mental and emotional health issues. In some cultures it is inappropriate to have members of different sex attend group activity together. Use language carefully to support your thesis making sure to avoid potential conflicts.
6. *Specify the time frame of the program.* If time is not properly managed, the participants may experience burn out. The six week time frame is adequate if managed properly.
7. *Make sure that the topics are engaging, relevant and communicated with empathy and understanding.* The participants must be encouraged and not bullied. The use of seasoned Pastors and Minister cannot be overemphasized. The participants must sense apathy and understanding from the presenter.
8. *Use visual gadgets to encourage learning.* Videos, cards and presentation materials are necessary for learning and sustaining audience interest in the topic.
9. *Create support within the church for the program.* The members must be made aware of the importance of the program to the local church. The presence of the senior pastor and members of leadership are helpful towards encouraging participation and providing legitimacy for

the program. Some refugees have convinced themselves that they are second class citizens. Those feelings must not be sustained within the walls of our churches.

10. Churches must offer other types of support to this group. Churches must understand that the challenges that refugees face, though complex are interrelated. Efforts must be channeled towards meeting both the spiritual; as well as the physical needs of this group.

### **Outcome of Research**

The researcher has witnessed increase participation in church activities and social interactions within the refugee members of the church. There is a renewed sense of belonging and the researcher has noted greater confidence in their futures in the United States among the refugees. The researcher believes that the research contributed immensely towards imbuing a new sense of identity to this group and the data supports this conclusion.

**APPENDIX A**

**TERMINOLOGY**

## TERMINOLOGY

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<i>Coping:</i>	Coping is a search for significance and meaning at a time of stress or challenge. It is a method that is utilized by the sufferer to adapt to an overwhelming situation.
<i>Established Refugee:</i>	An Established Refugee is a refugee that has resettled in a host country and has attained a high level of professional and personal success. When compared with the past, this person has completely overcome series of challenges that sometimes defies the odds.
<i>Ger:</i>	Another name for a stranger, visitor or resident alien in the Old Testament.
<i>In Flight Stressor:</i>	Stressors that refugees experience on their way to freedom. These stressors could occur during the refugee's flight through the bushes, deserts, mountains refugee camps, third country etc. Examples are rape, murder, kidnapping, language barrier, assaults, loss of family members, loss of economic status and shelter.
<i>Integration:</i>	The process of assimilation by the refugees in a host country.
<i>Post Immigration Stressors:</i>	Challenges and destabilizing events as a result of war, devastation, famine or any human or natural calamities that a refugee or asylum seeker faces in their host country. These stressors occurred after the refugee left their country of origin. For example: language barrier, separation from family members, unemployment, discrimination in a host country, etc.
<i>Pre Immigration Stressors:</i>	Challenges and destabilizing events as a result of war, devastation, famine or any human or natural calamities that a refugee or asylum seeker faces in their country of origin. These stressors occurred before the refugee left their country of origin. Examples are rape, murder, kidnapping, language barrier, assaults, loss of family members, loss of economic status and shelter.
<i>PTSD:</i>	Mental health disorders are normally characterized as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) where there is trauma involved. They can range in severity from depression to severe psychiatric disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder is

triggered by past traumatic events such as wars, natural disasters, diseases, death of loved ones, violence, physical abuse and displacement. All these stressors are common experiences of refugees.

*Refugee:*

An individual who is fleeing or has fled his homeland as result of war, ethnic or political violence with the goal of safeguarding his life and security.

*Resettlement:*

The concept of being fully assimilated into a new society or a host country with the goal of safeguarding the life and security of the refugee.

*Rosenberger Test:*

A scientifically reliable test for measuring self-esteem.

*Sample Group:*

This group is the established refugees who have lived in the United States for over ten years. They are successful and have been through the same experiences the target group is experiencing. They are the “Established Refugees” in this project.

*Target Group:*

In this project, this group refers to the subject participants who are being studied.

*Trauma:*

Stressful event or events that impact a person’s spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological well-being. Examples are: a loss of family members; being in a combat zone; having been raped, kidnapped and otherwise victimized. These are common refugee experiences.

*Woundedness:*

A state of constant pain as a result of past loss or trauma. This pain could be unknown to the sufferer.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **BIBLE STUDY COURSE OUTLINE**

## BIBLE STUDY COURSE OUTLINE

**Title: Stranger No More. A Bible Study on Healing for the Refugee Believer)**

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### *Week One Agenda*

Sunday      Who Am I?

Wednesday    Does God Really Love Me?

- Opening
  - Worship and Prayer
  - Bible Studies
- Pre Test Survey
- Introduction of Project
- Recital of Affirmations/Meditations
- Discussions
- Evaluations
- Closing

### *Week Two Agenda*

Sunday      Does God Have a Plan for Me?

Wednesday    Does God Have a Plan for Me in the United States?

- Opening
  - Worship and Prayer
  - Bible Studies
- Recital of Affirmations/Meditations
- Bible Study
- Discussions
- Evaluations
- Closing

### *Week Three Agenda*

Sunday      Why Have I Suffered so Much?

Wednesday    What is My New Identity in Christ?

- Opening
  - Worship and Prayer
  - Bible Studies
- Recital of Affirmations/Meditations
- Bible Study
- Discussions
- Evaluations
- Closing

*Week Four Agenda*

- Sunday Does God Care for the Stranger? Old Testament Study
- Wednesday Does God Care for the Stranger? Old Testament Study, Part 2
- Opening
    - Worship and Prayer
    - Bible Studies
  - Recital of Affirmations/Meditations
  - Bible Study
  - Discussions
  - Evaluations
  - Closing

*Week Five Agenda*

- Sunday Does God Care for the Stranger? New Testament Study
- Wednesday Does God Care for the Stranger? New Testament Study Part 2
- Opening
    - Worship and Prayer
    - Bible Studies
  - Recital of Affirmations/Meditations
  - Bible Study
  - Discussions
  - Evaluations
  - Closing

*Week Six Agenda*

- Sunday: How Can I Forgive My Persecutors?
- Wednesday: How Can I Forgive and Accept Myself?
- Opening
    - Worship and Prayer
    - Bible Studies
  - Recital of Affirmations/Meditations
  - Bible Study
  - Discussions
  - Final Program Evaluations
  - Communion
  - Closing

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PRE AND POST TEST SURVEY–REGISTRATION FORM**

## PRE AND POST TEST SURVEY–REGISTRATION FORM

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The following questions are given to the individual participants before and at the end of the six week intervention.

*Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. Your identities and answers will be kept anonymous. You may choose to not answer any questions at any time.*

Date:

- Are you a refugee?    Yes                      No
- What year did you arrive in the USA?
- Gender:    Male or Female
- How old are you?
- Marital status?
  - Married                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Widowed \_\_\_\_\_
  - Never Married                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Divorced \_\_\_\_\_
- Level of education completed before coming to the U. S.?
  - No formal education                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Vocational School                      \_\_\_\_\_
  - College/University                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Other training (please specify)
- Current level of education?
- Are you currently working?    Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your current occupation?
- How satisfied are you with your life in the United States?
  - Very Satisfied                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Satisfied                      \_\_\_\_\_
  - Somewhat satisfied                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Unsatisfied                      \_\_\_\_\_
  - Very Dissatisfied                      \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your religious/spiritual background?
- How important is religion to you?
- Do you attend your place of worship/church regularly?                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you attend your place of worship/Church each week                      \_\_\_\_\_

- Do you participate in church activities? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
- How often? 1-2 times a week \_\_\_\_ Over 3 times a week \_\_\_\_
- What is the plan of God for me in this land and how do I fit into it?
- Does God care for the welfare of newcomers in a new land?
- Is there hope for me in this land?
- Am I a second class citizen in this land?
- How do I preserve my sense of self-worth in this new place?
- What is the duty of the church in helping me achieve a healthy self-image?
- What does the bible say concerning welcoming newcomers?
- What effect, if any, does Bible study about the love God for strangers have on my self-esteem?
- What effect, if any, does meditations, affirmations, prayer and worship have on my self-esteem?
- How can the church be more effective in addressing the emotional and psychological issues newcomers face within our church communities?
- Tell us the story of how you came to the United States.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **ROSENBERGER TEST**

## ROSENBERGER TEST <sup>1</sup>

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This self-esteem questionnaire will establish baseline self-esteem measurements:

*Check each statement that you find to be true:*

- I generally feel anxious in new social situations where I may not know what is expected of me.
- I find it difficult to hear criticism about myself.
- I fear being made to look like a fool.
- I tend to magnify my mistakes and minimize my successes.
- I am very critical of myself and others.
- I have periods in which I feel devastated and/or depressed.
- I am anxious and fearful much of the time.
- When someone mistreats me, I think I must have done something to deserve it.
- I have difficulty knowing whom to trust and when to trust.
- I often feel like I don't know the right thing to do or say.
- I am very concerned about my appearance.
- I am easily embarrassed.
- I think others are very focused on -and critical of- what I say and do.
- I fear making a mistake which others might see.
- I often feel depressed about things I've said and done, or that I have failed to say or do.
- I have avoided making changes in my life because I was fearful of making a mistake or failing.
- I often get defensive and strike back when I perceive I am being criticized.
- I have not accomplished what I am capable of due to fear and avoidance.
- I tend to let fear and anxieties control many of my decisions.
- I tend to think negatively much of the time.
- I have found it difficult to perform adequately or without embarrassment when involved in sex.
- I'm one of the following:
  - The person who reveals too much personal information.
  - The person who seldom reveals personal information.
- I often get so anxious that I don't know what to say.
- I often procrastinate.
- I try to avoid conflict and confrontation.
- I have been told am too sensitive.
- I felt inferior or inadequate as a child.
- I tend to think that I have higher standards than others.
- I often feel like I don't know what is expected of me.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenberg Personality Testing on Self-Esteem, accessed July 14, 2014, [www.http//personalitytesting.info/test/RSE.php](http://personalitytesting.info/test/RSE.php).



- I often compare myself to others.
- I frequently think negative thoughts about myself and others.
- I often feel that others mistreat me or take advantage of me.
- At night, I frequently review my day, analyzing what I said and did or what others said and did to me that day.
- I often make decisions on the basis of what would please others rather than on what I want or without even considering what I want.
- I often think others don't respect me.
- I often refrain from sharing my opinions, my ideas, and my feelings in groups.
- I sometimes lie when I feel that the truth would result in criticism or rejection.
- I am fearful that I will say or do something that will make me look stupid or incompetent.
- I do not set goals for the future.
- I am easily discouraged.
- I am not very aware of my feelings.
- I grew up in a dysfunctional home.
- I think life is harder for me than for most other people.}
- I often avoid situations where I think I will be uncomfortable.
- I feel too embarrassed to eat out alone or to attend movies and other activities by myself.
- I often find myself angry or hurt by the behavior and words of others.
- At times I get so anxious or upset that I experience most of the following: heart racing or pounding, sweating; fearfulness; blushing; difficulty swallowing or lump in my throat; shaking; poor concentration dizziness, nausea or diarrhea; butterflies.
- I am very fearful of criticism, disapproval or rejection.
- I rely on the opinion of others to make decisions.
- I have suffered from violence or trauma in the past.

The scale of measure for this test is:

00-04 Statements:	You have fairly good self-esteem
05-10 Statements:	You have mild low self-esteem
11-18 Statements:	You have moderately low self-esteem
19-50 Statements:	You have severely low self esteem

## **APPENDIX E**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ESTABLISHED REFUGEES**

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ESTABLISHED REFUGEES

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The purpose of this survey is to explore what effects spiritual activities like bible studies, prayer, meditation, scripture readings, affirmations and worship have on the self-esteem of refugees. In order to do so we would like to ask you questions that concern your involvement or lack of involvement in these spiritual exercises.

*Your answers will be kept anonymous and you may choose to not answer any questions at any time.*

Date:

- Are you a refugee?    Yes \_\_\_\_    No \_\_\_\_
  - What year did you arrive in the USA?
  - Are you                      Male \_\_\_\_    Female \_\_\_\_
  - How old are you?
  - Marital status?
    - Married                      \_\_\_\_                      Widowed \_\_\_\_
    - Never Married                      \_\_\_\_                      Divorced \_\_\_\_
  - Level of education completed before coming to the U. S.?
    - No formal education                      \_\_\_\_                      Vocational School                      \_\_\_\_
    - College/University                      \_\_\_\_                      Other training (please specify)
  - What is your current level of education?
  - Are you working now?
  - What is your current occupation?
  - How satisfied are you with your life in the United States?
    - Very Satisfied                      \_\_\_\_                      Satisfied                      \_\_\_\_
    - Somewhat satisfied                      \_\_\_\_                      Unsatisfied                      \_\_\_\_
    - Very Dissatisfied                      \_\_\_\_
  - What is your religious/spiritual background?
  - How important is religion to you?
  - Do you attend your place of worship /Church regularly? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
  - How often do you attend your place of worship/Church each week?
  - Do you participate in Church Activities?                      Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
- How often?    1-2 times a week \_\_\_\_                      Over 3 times a week \_\_\_\_

- Which of the following activities do you participate in?  
*Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	
- Of all the activities in your church which do you rate the most beneficial?  
*Please circle one:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	
- Why do you rate this spiritual exercise/s most beneficial to you?
- When did you find these spiritual exercises most beneficial?
- Did these spiritual exercises help you in your experience as a refugee?
- If yes, in what way?
- If no, what helped you through your refugee experiences?
- During the time of your crisis, as a refugee, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	
- When you felt threatened or in danger, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	
- When you were persecuted, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ?  
*Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you feared for your life, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ?

*Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you felt depressed, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ?

*Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you desired a new opportunity e. g. a job, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you were feeling lonely or deserted, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you needed companionship, which of the following spiritual activities did you employ? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you experienced a low point/difficult experience in your refugee experience which of the following spiritual activities did you employ? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- When you experienced a high point/good experience in your refugee experience did you employ any of the following spiritual experiences? *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	

- Now in the USA, do you currently participate in: *Please circle those that apply:*

Bible Study	Affirmations	Prayer/Intercession
Meditations	Worship	Pastoral Prayer
Scripture Readings	Congregational Prayer	
- How often do you engage in these spiritual activities?
- Are you happy with your life now?
- What do you think is the purpose of your life?
- Do you think that God has a plan for your life?
- How do you explain the difficulties and sufferings that you have lived through?
- How were you able to cope with these experiences?
- Do you have a sense of hope in the future? Why/Why not?
- Do you have a sense of peace about the past?
- How has your religious experiences helped in your settlement in the United States?
- Please give us a brief description of your refugee journey to the United States.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **STORIES OF ESTABLISHED REFUGEES**

## STORIES OF ESTABLISHED REFUGEES

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*Jean* is from the country of Burundi (East Africa) and is forty-five years old.

Unlike other refugees, Jean is well trained even before coming to the United States. She held posts in the government bureau but fled Burundi as a new government began to kill political opponents or anyone perceived as being one. She and her husband quickly fled to Kenya and from there sought a visa to the United States. It was a long and difficult process and Kenya was not very welcoming of refugees.

Jean came into the country over ten years ago and has acquired a degree and a Master's education in Business Administration. She is married and is the mother of three children. Jean is very passionate about helping other refugees and is a foster parent to refugee kids in the area. She is also heavily involved in helping refugees become resettled in the United States. She is the manager of a refugee medical group attached to the Maricopa Medical Hospital in Phoenix, AZ. It is a nonprofit organization that helps refugee women to understand their reproductive rights and encourages them to seek out help for their medical needs. All new settlers are taught basic hygiene, life skills and reproductive health. She loves her job and believes that a lot of refugees are ignorant of the vast resources available to them. According to her, "the NGO's are not doing enough to resettle refugees."

Jean is a committed Christian who views her job as a ministry opportunity. She says that God is the reason she is alive today and claims that her church is the bedrock of her success in the United States. She is a Methodist who says that without the support, prayers and fellowship of her church members, she would not have been able to overcome a lot of her challenges in the United States. Her preflight commitment to the



Lord was lukewarm but now she attributes God and her religious activities as the best thing that has happened to her. “I learned through my suffering.” She says. When asked which of the spiritual exercises was very beneficial to her, she quickly says “prayer and worship, it greatly relieved me of my burdens”

*Faith* is a refugee from Burkina Faso (North West Africa) but her husband is from Chad. She is a High School Teacher with the Phoenix Union High School District and has been in the United States for ten years. She is married and is the mother of one son. Faith believes that her dependency on spiritual activities has been the “only formula for my success...” Faith believes that she has fared very well, compared to her fellow refugees because God supernaturally met her as soon as she came into the United States. From her entry into the United States to the present, her host Pastor has constantly prayed for her and her family. He has taught them through bible studies that God loves them. The notion that God loves her was very foreign to her before her entry to the United States. Faith had been a nominal and uncommitted Baptist who only attended church as a tradition. Here in the US, she joined a vibrant and charismatic church that taught her to pray, to intercede and to meditate on the scriptures. She said these activities helped her and husband tremendously in their healing from past traumas.

*Florence* is the mother of two kids who came into the United States from Rwanda. She and her husband escaped the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and fled to Kenya through Burundi. She talks about the death of her family members and of being raped in a refugee camp while pregnant. Her eventual resettlement in the United States was a great relief to her. Little did she know that there were greater challenges ahead. Her husband could not find a job for many years after their entry into the United States. He resorted to

drinking and became an alcoholic. He was later involved in a ghastly accident and became handicapped. The difficulties they experience resulted in divorce years later. Florence remained focused and took her GED. She went into nursing school and is now a licensed vocational nurse. She recently bought a home for her and her two kids.

When asked how she was able to remain focused despite all her sufferings, Florence said, “God taught me to pray and depend on him.” Florence says her Pastor was a great source of help, who made sure she was in church on Wednesdays and Sundays. Her Pastor taught her to study the bible and most importantly taught her to worship God in the midst of her sufferings. She says “singing has become a part of me.... my children expect me to sing every day.” Worship, she says, relieved her of stress and made her cope with all her challenges. She says “I have not been completely healed but I am sane. I am not crazy because I learned to sing and worship God.”

*Grace* is from the Congo (Central Africa). Like most refugees, she has witnessed murders, kidnapping and various life threatening events. Grace was reluctant to give details of her experience and only confirmed that she lost family members and lived for two years in a refugee camp in Tanzania. Grace said she has always been religious but did not feel connected to God. She said she harbored strong feelings of anger towards God for letting her mother die during the war in Congo. In her mind, God should have spared her mother and she feels betrayed by God. When asked if she is involved in spiritual activities in her church she says “no” but added that if she meets a Pastor who can explain to her why God allowed her mother to die, “I will consider going back to church.” Grace is a social worker and a Translator with the International Rescue Committee in Phoenix, Arizona.

*Jean-Pierre* is from Burundi (East Africa). He is a religious leader in his community and pastors a small church of mostly refugees from Burundi. Pastor Jean Pierre fled when the Hutu-Tutsi tribal cleansing spilled into Burundi from Rwanda. He pastored a large congregation in Burundi. Most of his congregation was killed during the ethnic cleansing program. He witnessed a series of brutal killings said he, “almost lost my mind...” He fled with his family in the middle of the night before reaching the Congo, where he stayed in a United Nations refugee camp. He has lived in the United States for fifteen years.

Pastor Jean says he is very committed to prayer, bible study, affirmations, and meditations because “they were all our family had in the midst of our crises. Now in the United States, these spiritual exercises have helped him to forget the past pains and even forgive his enemies: the Hutus. In fact some Hutus attend his church here in the United States. Pastor Jean says he is at peace with the past although sometimes when he remembers the murders he witnessed in Burundi, he often asks God “Why is the devil so wicked?”

Certainly prayers and intercession have helped him remain focused and he says that he has witnessed too many miracles and answers to prayers to doubt the efficacy of these spiritual exercises. He is a firm believer in the power of prayer, scripture reading, and affirmations, to help heal the human mind, and renew greater faith in God. Many of his church members have also been helped in this manner.

*Marie* is a translator with the Arizona Department of Economic Security. She is from Ivory Coast (West Africa) and came to the United States seven years ago. She and her husband, a Muslim, fled the Ivory Coast to France and later traveled to the United

States. Marie graduated from the University of Arizona last year and is currently studying for her Master's degree. She credits her success and peace of mind to her commitment to God and her involvement in church activities. This is especially so "during my divorce, when I thought that my whole world was collapsing under me. I use to pray and read my bible every day because my husband threatened to kill me and our daughter. The abuse Marie experienced led her to deeper involvement in her church, where she employed various spiritual exercises to connect with God and make meaning of her suffering. "I prayed for God to change my husband and bring him back to me. Although he did not come back to me, I have the heart now to forgive him and release him." When asked if she is healed from the past traumas she said "completely"

*Patrick* is the leader of his tribal association in Phoenix. He is a refugee from Congo and lives in the Phoenix area with his American born wife. They have two daughters. Patrick is highly trained and possesses a Ph. D. in Environmental Engineering. Patrick is a devoted Christian and has helped counsel many Congolese family going through distresses and challenges in their marriages. He is not a Pastor but he says that people gravitate to him because he is a leader in the community and is a happily married man. Patrick is from a wealthy family and was sent to the United States at an early age to avoid being killed by government officials. Unfortunately, his mother, father and sister were killed in the war in the Congo. He said that for a long time, he felt guilty about surviving the war. That guilt, he said, drove him to the church. Before this time, he had "zero interest in God" His training and education made it difficult for him to believe in a God. Moreover "what type of a God will allow my family members to die like chicken?" He did not think religion applied to the likes of him.

During Bible studies in his church, he learned that he should not feel guilty about the death of his family and understood that “evil is here because man sinned.” Bible studies and scripture readings helped him understand the reason for suffering and gave him a peace about his past. Patrick claimed to have been healed of years of sleeplessness, anxiety and conflicts about his past. When asked about the spiritual exercises he applied the most during this time of crises, Patrick replied “bible studies and meditations.”

Patrick says that he talks to whoever wants to listen about the power of the scriptures and meditations. Patrick believes that many refugees are conflicted about their past and that studying the bible and meditating on the scriptures would help towards their healings.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **BIOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF ESTABLISHED REFUGEES**

## BIOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF ESTABLISHED REFUGEES

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Name	Country of Birth	Religion Pre-flight	Religion in U.S.	Age	Sex	Education Prior to U.S.	Education in U.S.	Actively Involved in Spiritual Activities
Jean	Burundi	Christian	Christian	45	F	H. School	MA	Yes
Faith	B/Faso	Christian	Christian	55	F	Bachelor Degree	MA	Yes
Flo	Rwanda	Christian	Christian	27	F	12 Grade	LVN	Yes
Grace	Congo	Christian	Unknown	36	F	Bachelor Degree	BA	No
J. Pierre	Burundi	Christian	Christian	50	M	H. School	BA	Yes
Marie	I/Coast	Christian	Christian	40	F	H. School	MA	Yes
Patrick	Congo	Atheist	Christian	46	M	H. School	PhD	Yes

## **APPENDIX H**

### **BIOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF TARGET GROUP**



### BIOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF TARGET GROUP

Name	Country of Birth	Religion Pre-flight	Religion in U.S.	Age	Sex	Education Prior to U.S.	Education in U.S.	Actively Involved in Spiritual Activities
Ndika	Burundi	Christian	Christian	45	F	H. School	H/Sch.	Yes
Adiele	B/Faso	Christian	Christian	50	M	Bachelor Degree	Bachelor Degree	Yes
Mkufu	Rwanda	Christian	Christian	27	F	12 Grade	H/Sch.	Yes
Manuel	Congo	Christian	Unknown	36	F	Bachelor Degree	H/Sch.	No
Opong	Burundi	Christian	Christian	48	M	H. School	H/Sch.	Yes
Gracie	I/Coast	Christian	Christian	40	F	H. School	H/Sch.	Yes
Sadiku	Congo	Atheist	Christian	46	M	H. School	H/Sch.	Yes

## **APPENDIX I**

### **CALENDAR OF CLASSES AND TOPICS**

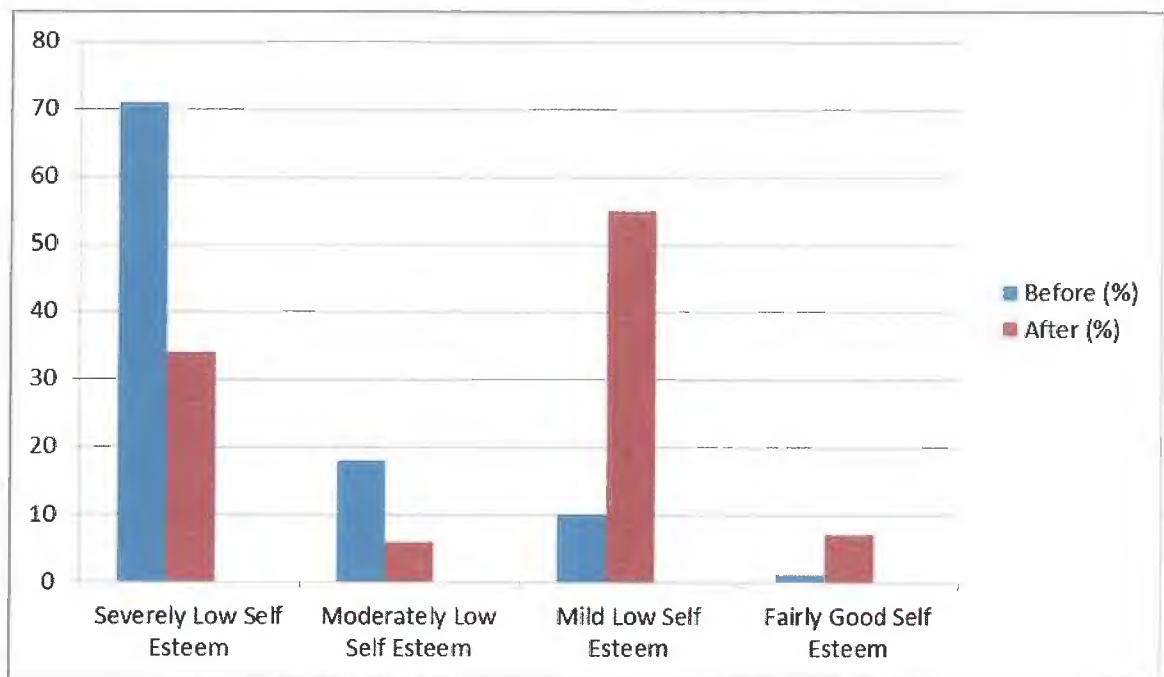
### CALENDAR OF CLASSES AND TOPICS

Week #	Topic of Discussions and Reflections	Bible Study Texts	Meditations	Affirmation	Points of Reflections
<i>Week 1</i> Wednesday	Who Am I?	I am a child of God Almighty. Gal. 3:26	I am made in God's image Gen 1:27	I am a wonderfully and skillfully made. Ps 139:13-14	I am God's best material,
Sunday	Does God really love me?	I am loved of God. 1 John 4: 1-2	Nothing can separate me from the love of God. Rom. 8:38-39	God loves me so much, He died for me. John 3:16	I am created out of God's Love
<i>Week 2</i> Wednesday	Does God have a Plan for me?	I have been chosen by God John 15:16	I am God's workmanship. Eph. 2:10	God has plans for a future and a hope for me. . Jer. 29:11	I am in God's mind. His thoughts are for my wellbeing
Sunday	Does God have a plan for me in the USA?	Like Joseph, I have been chosen to prosper in this new land. Gen. 41	God will, with my cooperation, fulfill His purpose for me. Ps. 57:2	I am destined for greater things. Haggai 2: 9	God brought me to USA and will help me fulfill my destiny and purpose.
<i>Week 3</i> Wednesday	Why have I suffered so much	In my trials, I have gained faith and maturity. James 1:2	God did not punish me instead He helped me. Genesis 45: 4-8	My character is refined in my sufferings. Rom 5:3-5 Hebrews 2:10	God is not the researcher of my suffering but refines me through them
Sunday	What is my new identity in Christ Jesus?	I am now a member of Christ's body. 1 Cor. 12:27	I am strong in Christ and can do all things through Him. Phil. 4:13	I have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor. 2:16	I have a new mind and Identity in Christ Jesus
<i>Week 4</i> Wednesday	Does God care for the stranger? Old Testament Part 1	God's own people were strangers and God saved them. Deut. 26:1-9	God understands the heart of the stranger. Exodus 23:9	God protects the strangers in the midst of afflictions. . Lev. 19:23-24	Just like God cared for the strangers, He is also looking out for me
Sunday	Does God care for the stranger? Old Testament Part 2	Examples of strangers or "gers" in the Old Testament Gen. 12; Gen. 40-41	Like Abraham and Moses, I have been called to a new land. Gen. 21:1	God loves all of His creation wherever they are located. Ruth 4:11-14	God has great plans and purposes for me in this new land.

<i>Week 5</i> Wednesday	Does God care for the stranger? New Testament Part 1	Jesus was anointed for the purpose of restoring all to Himself. Luke 4:18-19	Jesus broke all barriers to accepting others. Luke 10:25-37.	Jesus also lived like a stranger. Matt 4:13	We are all strangers on earth. Our final abode is in heaven.
Sunday	Does God care for the stranger? New Testament Part 2	Examples of strangers in the N/Testament i.e. Jairus' daughter, Sam. Woman Mark 5:22	Jesus confirms that hospitality to strangers is proof of our faith. Matt. 25:35-35	Paul affirms the doctrine that we are all strangers on earth. Eph. 2: 12-19	Jesus came to break all human barriers. I am accepted by God.
<i>Week 6</i> Wednesday	How can I forgive my persecutors?	When I forgive others, God also forgives me. Matt. 6:14-15	When I forgive others, I am more like God. Luke 23:33	The power to forgive others comes from God, if we ask 1 John. 5:14	Forgiveness will lead to the restoration of my peace
Sunday	How can I Forgive and Accept myself?	I am free of guilt and accepted by God. Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:1	God chose me to be holy and blameless. Eph. 1:4	Everything I have done is working out for my good. Rom. 8:28	Guilt and condemnation is not from God. I am forgiven.

## **APPENDIX J**

### **RESULTS FROM THE ROSENBERGER TESTS**

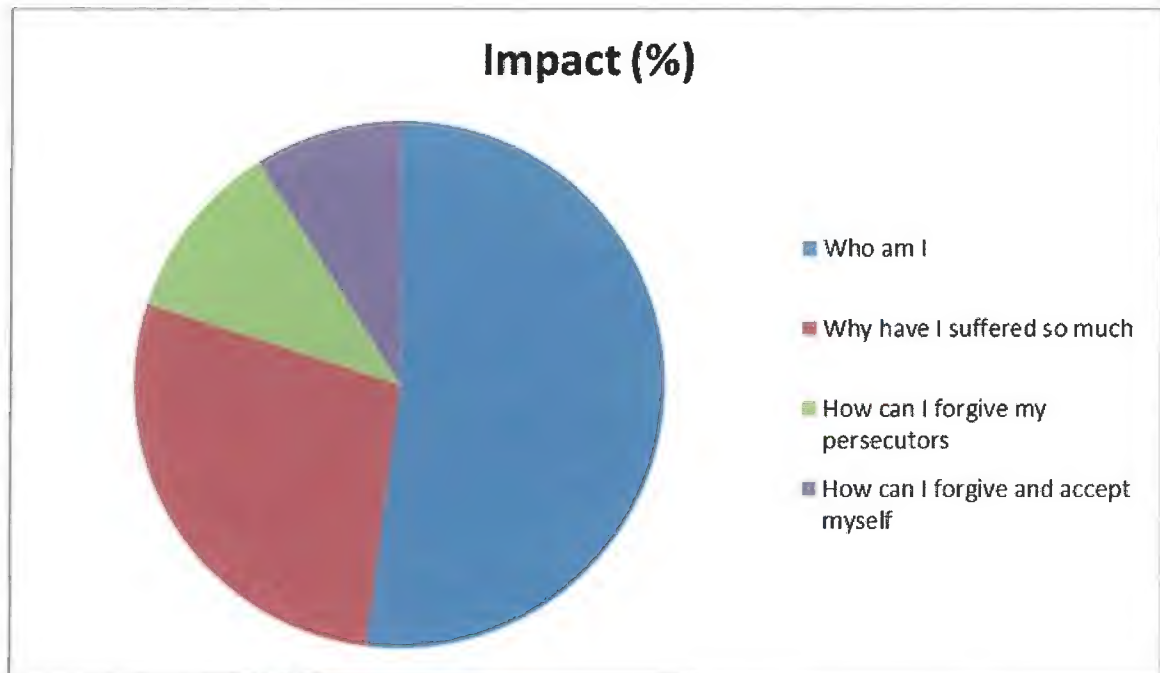
**RESULTS FROM THE ROSENBERGER TESTS**

## **APPENDIX K**

### **RATED PROGRAM TOPICS**

## RATED PROGRAM TOPICS

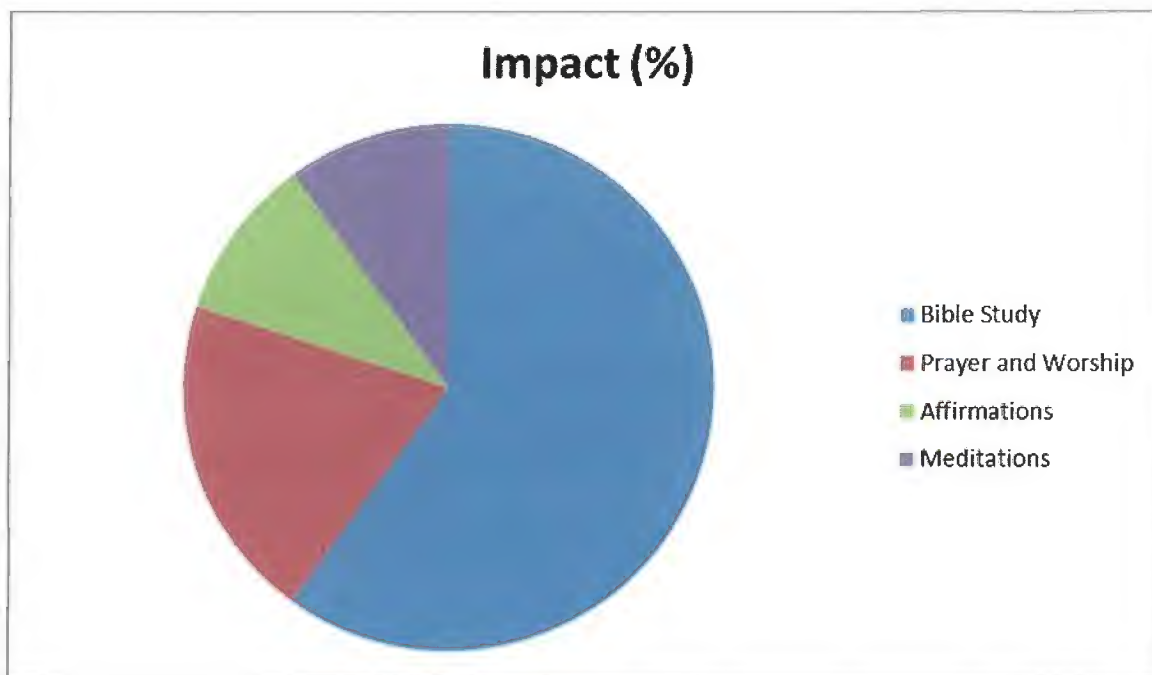
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## **APPENDIX L**

### **ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

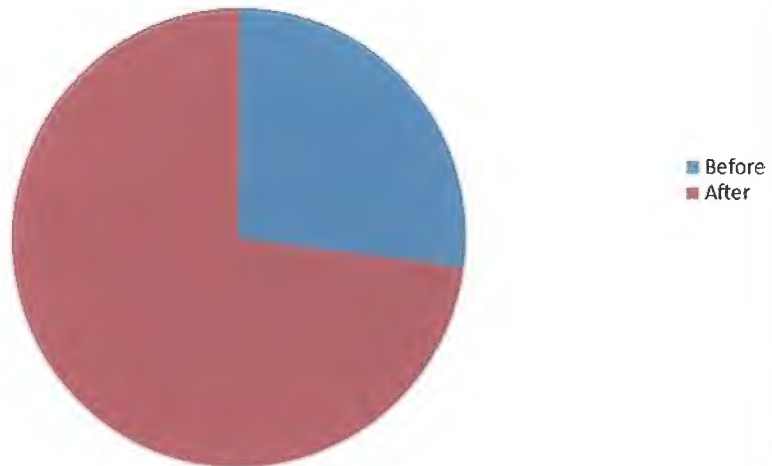
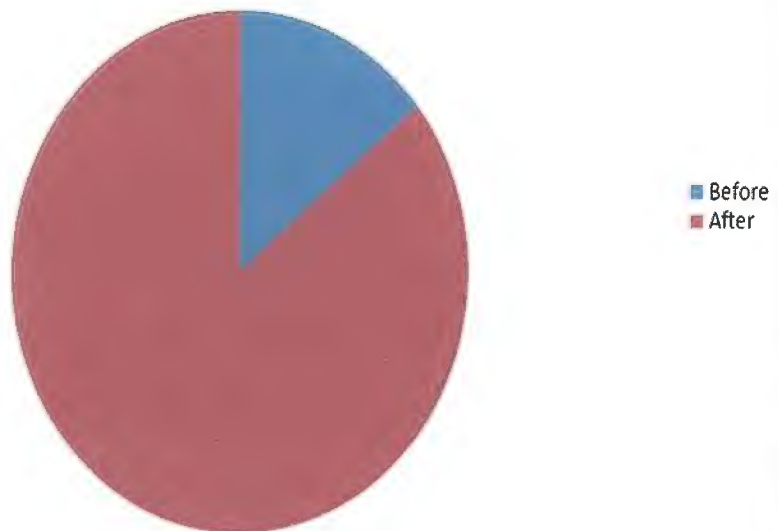
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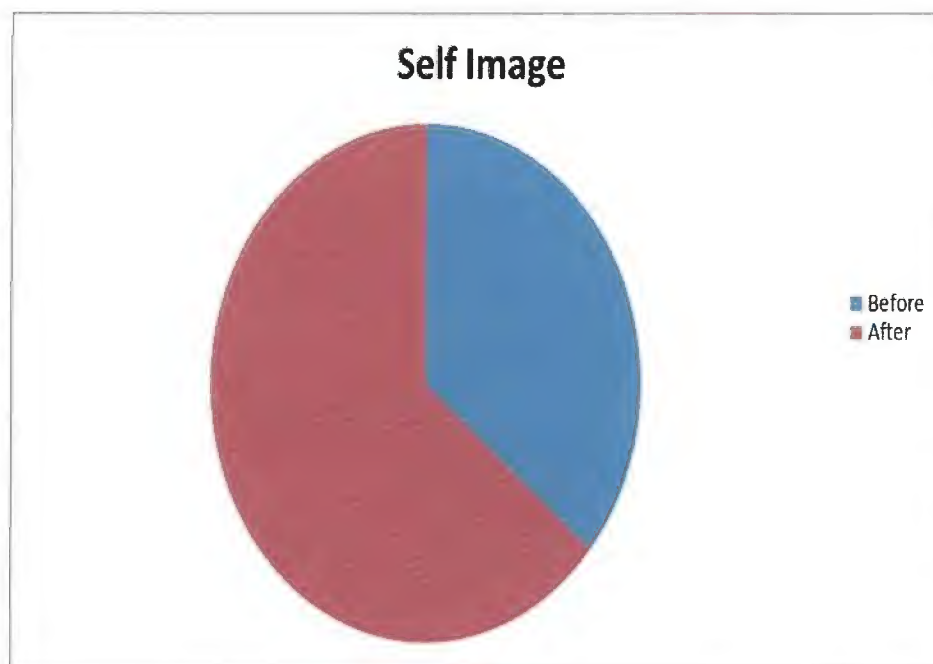
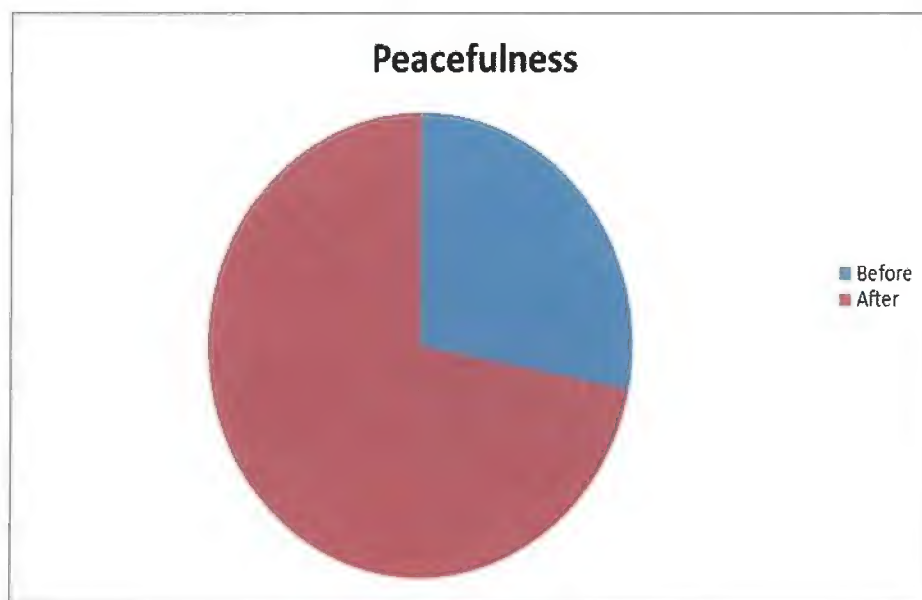
## **APPENDIX M**

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES**

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES**

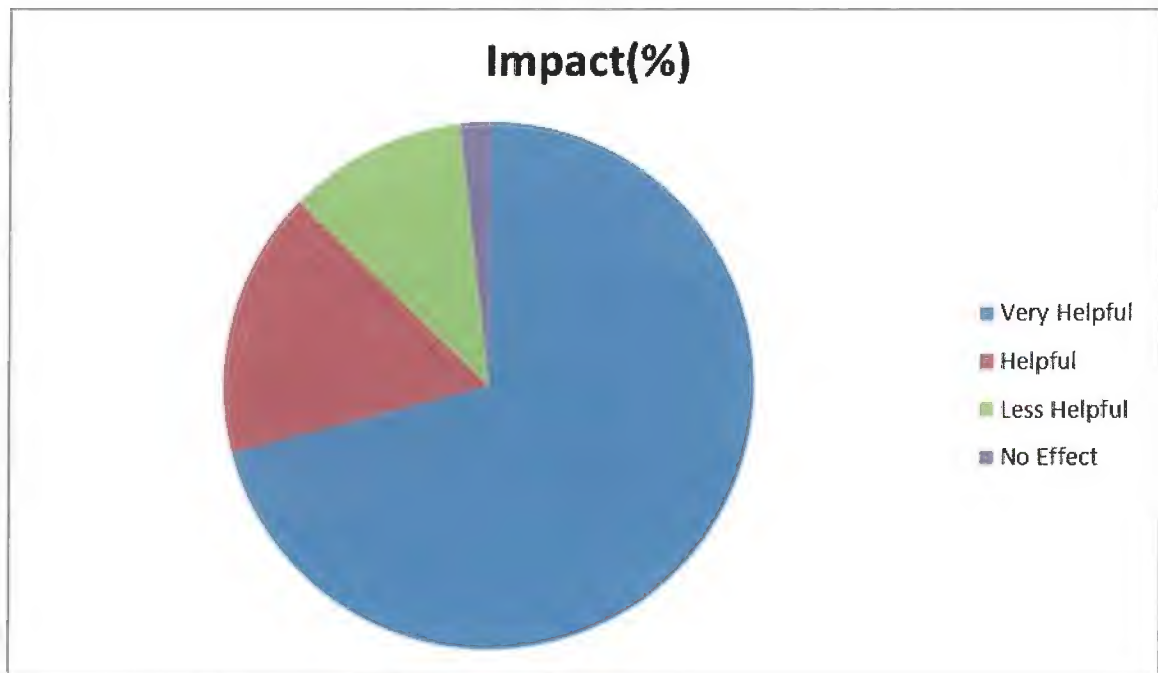
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**Assertiveness/Confidence****Joyfulness/Happiness**

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES**

## **APPENDIX N**

### **IMPACT OF BIBLE STUDY**

**IMPACT OF BIBLE STUDY**

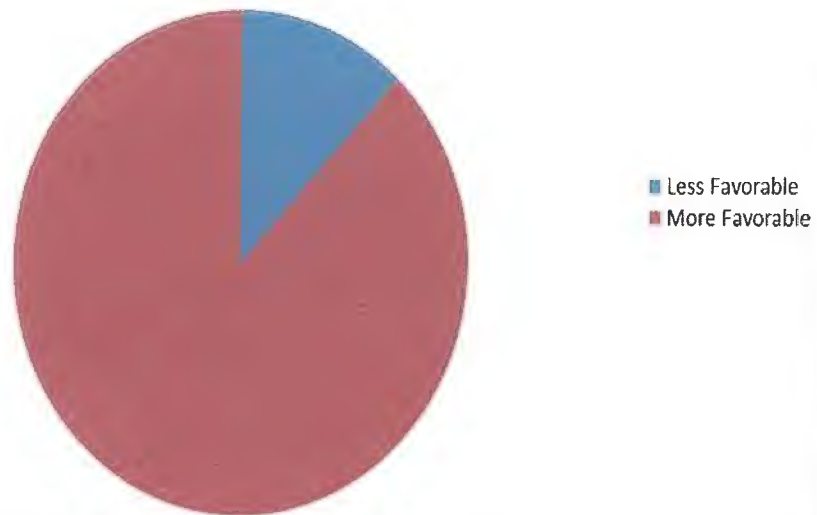
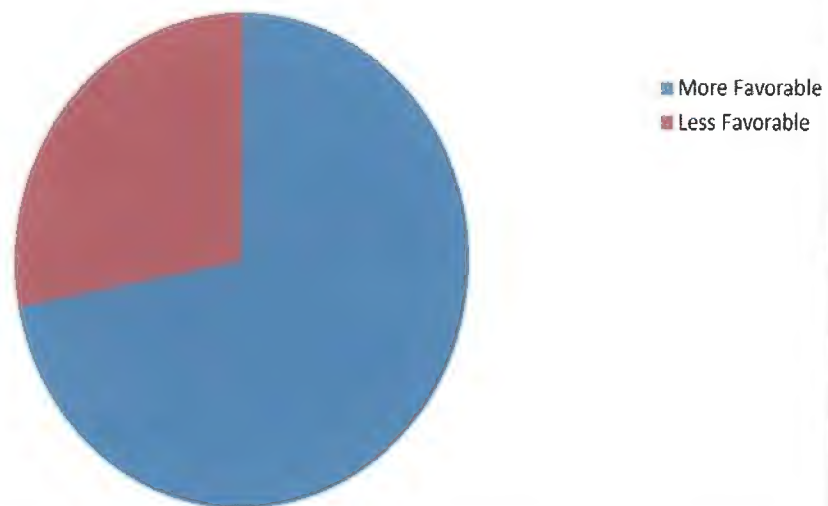
## **APPENDIX O**

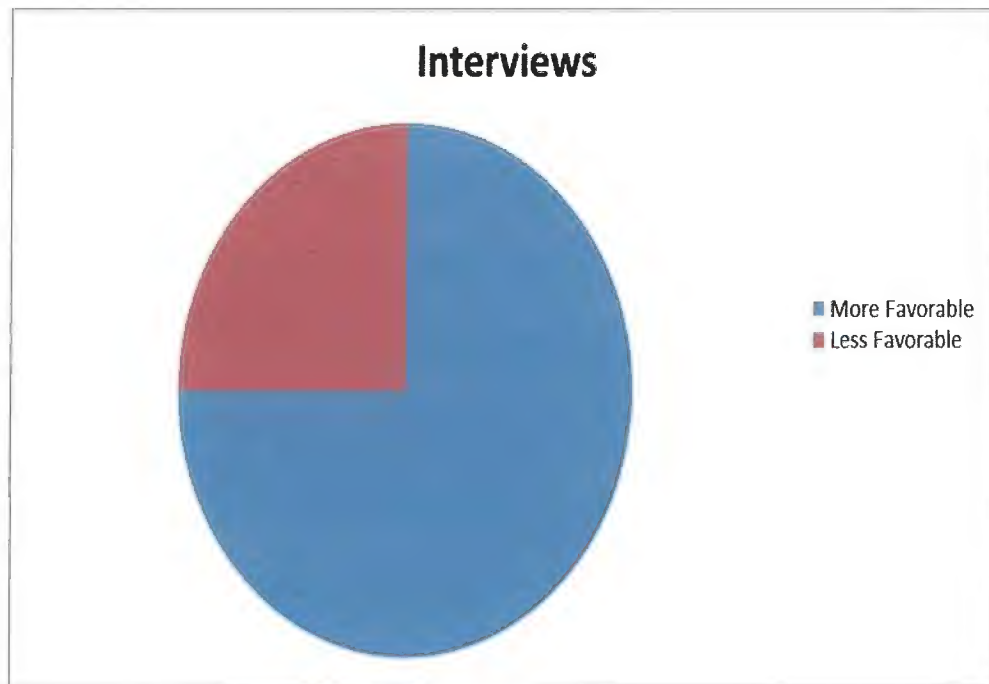
### **DATA ASSESSMENTS**



**DATA ASSESSMENTS**

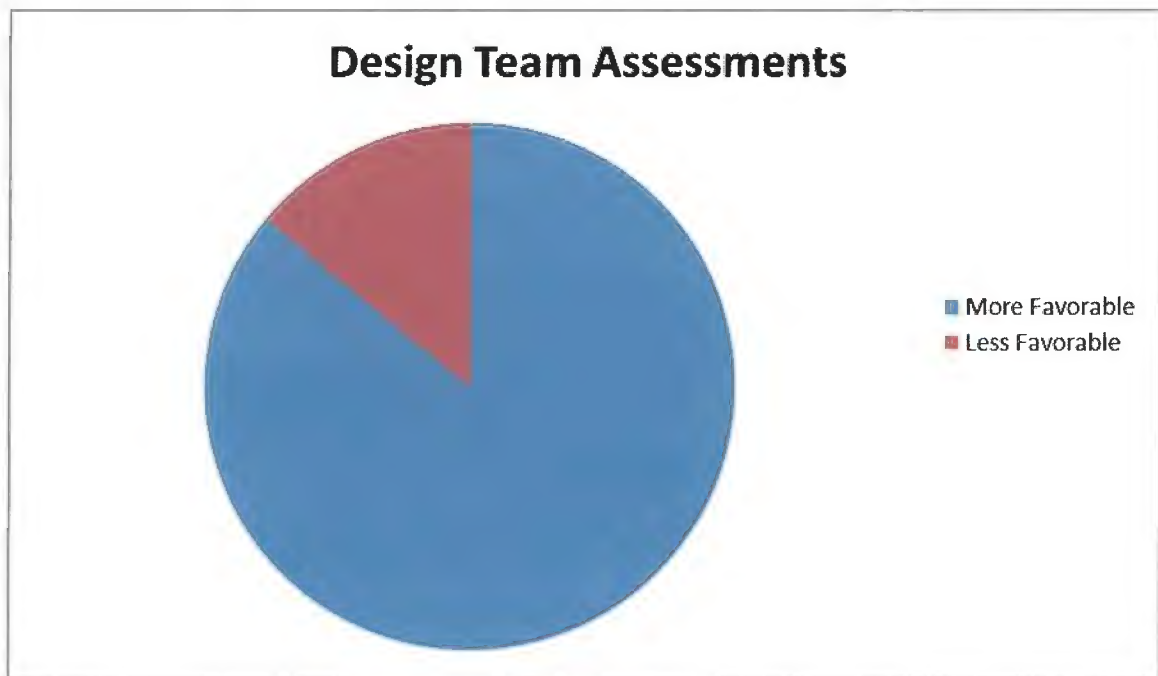
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**Questionnaire****Journals**



## **APPENDIX P**

### **FINAL PROGRAM EVALUATIONS**

**FINAL PROGRAM EVALUATION**

## **APPENDIX Q**

### **ACTION RESEARCH MINISTRY TEAM**

## **ACTION RESEARCH MINISTRY TEAM**

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### **Professional Associates**

#### *Dr. Karel Hanhart*

Dr. Karel Hanhart was a Faculty Mentor at the United Theological Seminary where he provided mentoring services to D. Min students in the Swisher Scholars program. He worked with the United Theological Seminary faculty and students to develop a course of study for each student that reflected the requirements of the seminary. Dr. Hanhart assisted the researcher in developing a Project Proposal that reflects her autobiography, context, and focus group. He also guided the researcher in the selection of bibliographic resources for research and monitored her progress through phases one to four of the Doctor of Ministry program.

Dr. Hanhart's vital contribution to the success of this project cannot be overemphasized. He has encouraged, nurtured and offered valuable insights at every level of the project's development. His wealth of knowledge in the subject matter has provided a platform for the researcher to progress successfully in the project. Dr. Hanhart is a seasoned pastor who has served at different churches in Ohio and Wisconsin areas. In his calling as a Pastor, he has helped churches develop their mission calls and create communal visions. Dr. Hanhart is currently the Pastor at First Presbyterian Church Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

#### *Dr. Sylvester Ajagbe*

Dr. Sylvester Ajagbe is the Executive Director and founder of Arizona Foundation of Social Justice, Children and Youth Services. He possesses a doctorate in Ministry, is a professor at Mesa Community College, and is a known social activist in the Phoenix Metropolitan area. Dr. Ajagbe was the Executive Director of Lutheran Social Service where he was in charge of refugee welfare and resettlement. His combined experiences in ministry, social activism and research are of great value to this project. He has been an incredible source of information and resources on refugee welfare in Arizona. Dr. Ajagbe continues to be a great source of information.

*Francis C. Ogbuji*

Attorney Francis C. Ogbuji has a practice in Phoenix, Arizona. He is an immigration lawyer that has represented various immigrant groups in the Phoenix Metropolitan area. His expertise is focused on representation of asylum seekers and refugees in Immigration Courts. He has a long history of working with refugees as an immigration advocate. Also an immigrant, Attorney Francis understands the difficulties and challenges that refugees face in their new homeland. He is a member of the Apostolic Church in Phoenix, Arizona, which is the context church for this project. He is being consulted because of his expertise in research development and because of his experiences working with various refugee groups in the area.

*Dr. Chris Nwokoro*

Dr. Nwokoro is the Senior Pastor of The Apostolic Church in Phoenix, AZ, the context church. He is a seasoned theologian who has presided over ten churches. He was a seminary Professor where he taught Theology and Old Testament. Dr. Nwokoro has firsthand knowledge of the behaviors and life styles of the refugees at the Apostolic Church, Phoenix, AZ. The researcher shall consult with him in the area of project development and writing.

**Context Associates**

*Pastor Vervant* is a Pastor in a church that is mostly Burundians. He is originally from Burundi and is refugee.

*Margaret Carter* is a Social Worker and a Master Degree student at the Grand Canyon University.

*Jean Medina* is a local Pastor and has a Masters in Divinity from Phoenix Seminary.

*Maureen Okeke* works with the City of Phoenix, as a registered Nurse.

*Anita Robinson* is a social worker and retired flight attendant. She has visited various countries of the world and understands cultural diversities.

**Peer Associate**

*Stephanie Wilson* is the Peer Associate for this thesis. She is a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary.

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